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COLUMBIA LAYS ASIDE HER LAURELS TO MOURN AT THE
BURNING OF HER BIRTHPLACE

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LETTERS WRITTEN BY A GENTLEMAN
IN BOSTON TO HIS FRIEND IN PARIS
DESCRIBING THE GREAT FIRE
WITH INTRODUCTORY CHAPTERS AND NOTES BY
HAROLD MURDOCK



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
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THE RIVERSIDE PRESS

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS, U. S. A.

NUMBER *16*

PREFACE

THE fact is painfully familiar, that on the 9th of November last, on a calm and mild evening, a fire broke out in the building numbered 83 and 85 Summer Street, and raged without control till the afternoon of the following day, spreading through the best business portions of Boston, covering sixty-five acres with ruins, destroying 776 buildings, assessed at the value of \$13,500,000, and consuming merchandise and other personal property estimated at more than sixty millions of dollars.—*Report of the Commissioners appointed to investigate the Cause and Management of the Great Fire in Boston.*

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The cuts in the text, except where otherwise indicated, are from the little guide-book, "Boston Illustrated," published by James R. Osgood & Co., for Peace Jubilee visitors in 1872.

I

INTRODUCTORY

1

1872

I

THE BOSTON OF 1872

THE member of the Harvard Class of 1872 who left Boston upon his graduation to return in this year of grace would find much that is strange and unfamiliar to his eyes. Thirty-seven years have passed since he threaded the well-known crooked streets; he has almost reached his threescore years, and his opportunities and achievements are all behind him. The world has changed with him, and even in this most leisurely and conservative of American cities, he would pause bewildered upon many well-known spots, and look in vain for the old landmarks and accustomed sights of his boyhood days.

The Christ Church chimes still clang their old-time melodies above the huddled roofs of the

North End. Faneuil Hall still gazes blankly down the crowded market streets; the Old State House yet defies the struggling traffic that curses it with every day. The Old South and King's Chapel hold unmolested their busy corners, the Common spreads its grassy acres in the city's throbbing heart, and the Park Street spire yet towers, a graceful landmark, across the broad reach of ancient greenery. But the fleeting years have wrought changes in and about these time-honored sites. Strange people chatter in unknown tongues beneath the Old North steeple, the Old South is buried in the midst of towering structures that play strange pranks with its bewildered weather-vane, the Old State House is pierced and mined by walks and tunnels that make for rapid transit. The Common has resisted stoutly all encroachments, but some of the outer walks are gone, the fences and great gates on the south and east have been removed, the Old Elm has fallen, and the Paddock elms are now but a pleasant memory. Indeed, Tremont Street from School to Boylston contains unaltered hardly a vestige of the archi-

ecture of 1872. True, the low-pillared front of St. Paul's stands, a lonely reminder of the past, but it has lost its old-time character and expression, engulfed as it is in the shadow of its high-piled

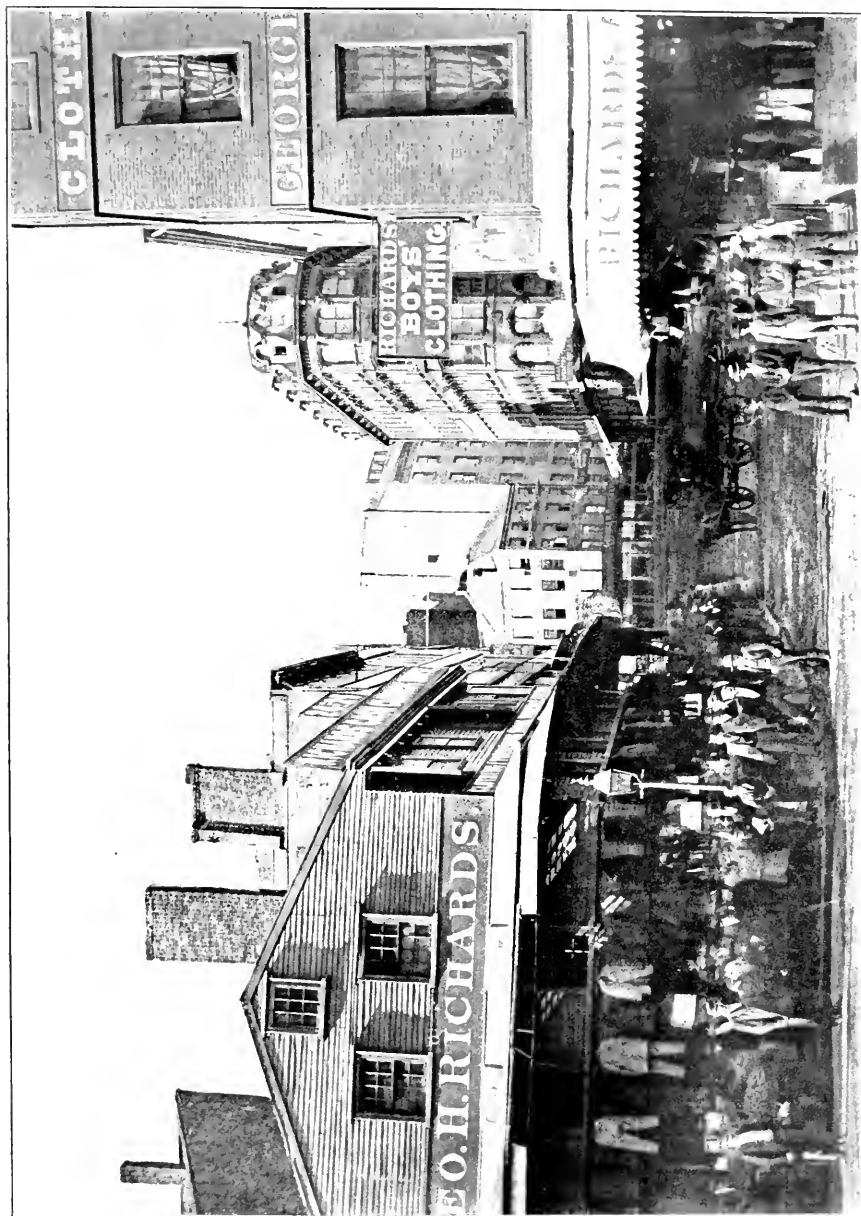


GRANARY BURVING-GROUND AND PADDOCK ELMS

modern neighbors. Nothing is left to suggest the horse cars jogging at snail's pace in endless column to and from the crowded walks under the Paddock elms. It is not easy to reconstruct an exact picture of the famous street as it was in the days before corporate consolidations and elec-

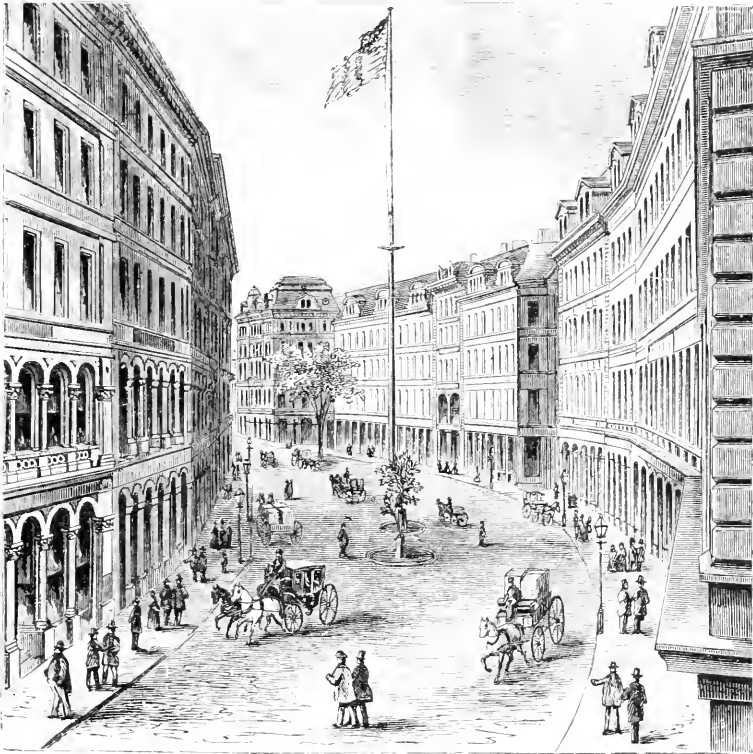
tricity, the subway and the referendum, had revolutionized the street transportation system of the city.

In 1872 the broad area that divides Court Street from Tremont Row had just been opened by the removal of the shapeless mass of Scollay's Building, while, walking down Cornhill, one passed into Washington Street, which turned sharply eastward at the Cornhill corner, to terminate in Dock Square. Devonshire Street in these days was continued from State to Dock Square only by a narrow footway lined by tiny shops. State Street itself, now the centre of the loftiest and most variegated architecture which the city contains, was then the abode of low harmonious blocks of gray stone that gave an impression of dignity and permanence. Post Office Square was undreamed of in 1872, and Congress Street from Water to Milk was a mean and narrow thoroughfare. The graceful curve of Franklin Street, with its long, imposing commercial blocks and its scattering trees and flagpole, ended in these days at Federal. There were dwellings in Purchase Street, and in



THE END OF WASHINGTON STREET AS SEEN FROM DOCK SQUARE IN THE DAYS
BEFORE THE FIRE

Summer Street below Church Green, while a handful of people still lived in Bedford Street and Temple Place. Arch and Hawley Streets were



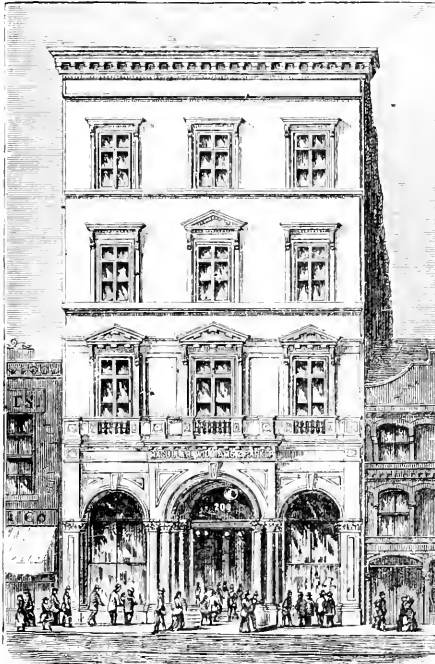
FRANKLIN STREET BEFORE THE FIRE

hardly more than lanes, and the former extended only from Franklin to Summer. It is hard to remember, now, how narrow and crooked the busy

streets used to be within the compass of that famous sixty acres that was long known as the Burned District. The unpretentious mass of Hovey's store, the stone building on the northerly corner of Summer and Washington streets, and the white façade of the Macullar-Parker Company, are almost the only survivals of Boston's business section that was swept by the great fire of 1872.

The Back Bay in those days was not built on beyond Dartmouth Street, and ugly gaps yawned between there and the Public Garden. Standing in the Garden, it was a short look up the Avenue, between lines of feeble saplings, to the dreary wastes that stretched away toward the Mill Dam. Copley Square was a sandy desert, where work on the Art Museum was just beginning. But three spires broke the Mansard monotony of this section: the brownstone shaft of the Arlington Street Church, and the more modern steeples of the Central Congregational and the First Unitarian, both on Berkeley Street. The South End was still the abode of a considerable portion of the solid men of Boston, and there was an abundance of snug for-

tunes and a plenitude of simple living in all the pleasant streets that crossed Tremont from Dover southward to Northampton Street. Columbus Ave-



MACULLAR, WILLIAMS & PARKER'S
BUILDING IN 1872

nue was completed only between Berkeley Street and West Chester Park, although work was being pushed on the extension into Park Square. The fate of the avenue was still trembling in the bal-

ance. Here lived many a worthy citizen, but Beacon Hill pronounced it shoddy, while fashion had declared for the windy half-built streets of the new-made land. Business had not invaded Boylston Street, and Beacon Hill was still the home of good old Boston families who were only beginning to be tempted away from its calm and dignified seclusion. Perhaps our graduate of 1872 would find to-day more of the Boston he remembered upon Beacon Hill than in any other section of the town. The noble spire of the First Baptist Church has gone, the Derne Street reservoir has been levelled, the State House has been enlarged and despoiled of its old-time charm, but the quiet streets on the Common slope are as they were, shaded by the same trees and lined by the same houses that have been the delight and pride of generations of distinguished Bostonians. Roxbury was thinly peopled in its southern portion. Dorchester was more rural than Milton is to-day, a rolling open country, village-dotted, where stone walls still climbed far-viewing hills, and where old-time farm-houses, with their great barns, were gradually giv-

ing way to the fine park-like places of Boston business men. The historic “corners” and “the



FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, SOMERSET STREET

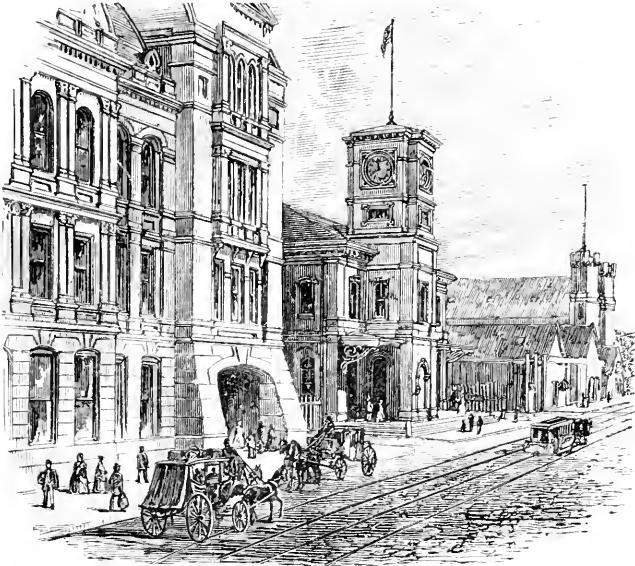
upper” and “the lower road” did not belie their names in 1872.

Street transportation was furnished in these days by four distinct horse-railway companies, the Metropolitan, the Cambridge, the Middlesex, running to Charlestown and the northern sub-

urbs, and the Broadway, which served South Boston, portions of which still formed attractive residential quarters. In addition to these, the Highland Railway, with its brilliant plaid-painted cars, began to operate in the autumn of 1872. In the cars of these corporations, dimly lighted by kerosene lamps in two corners, passengers shivered and shook, with icy feet poked deep in dirty straw, while the conductor's punch rang merrily as he collected his six-cent fare. Perhaps no sound was ever more suggestive of a great metropolitan community than the jangling of the horse-car bells and the clatter of the hoofs upon the well-worn cobblestones. Cars left the Tremont House every hour, for Brookline Village, and for Dorchester by way of Warren Street on the same schedule. On Washington Street the Metropolitan encountered the competition of Mr. Hathorne's Citizens Line of red coaches, which jolted their leisurely way from the stables in Northampton Street across the river to the thriving city of Charlestown.

The facilities for reaching and leaving the city

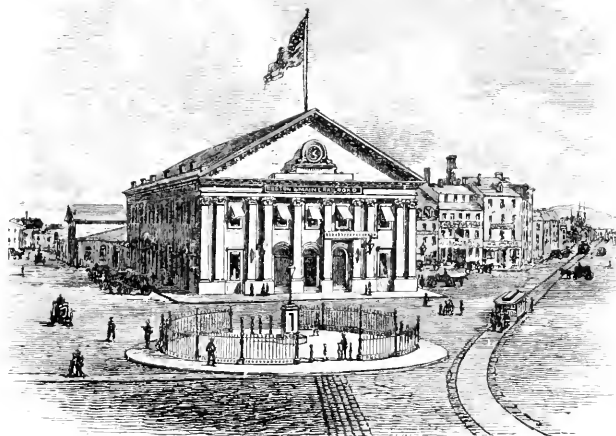
were regarded as ample in 1872. The Eastern, the Fitchburg, and the Boston and Lowell departed from stations in Causeway Street. The splendid new depot of the last-named corporation was in



THE CAUSEWAY STREET DEPOTS

process of erection, and its massive proportions were already indicated with sufficient clearness to emphasize the shortcomings of its dingy, square-towered neighbor, which reflected no credit upon the Eastern management. The massive stone castle of the Fitchburg, with its great hall up-

stairs redolent with memories of Jenny Lind, still served its purpose well. It stands to-day, and, though put to menial uses, wears all the rugged aspect that distinguished it in the time when the carriages of the wealthy and cultured stood lined up before it waiting for the concert to end. The



OLD BOSTON AND MAINE STATION

Boston and Maine gates closed and opened in Causeway Street, blockading and releasing traffic as the trains rumbled in and out of the Haymarket Square station, then the most commodious and best situated of all the city depots. At the foot of Summer Street, the Boston, Hartford and

Erie received its patrons in a shabby wooden structure that reflected but too vividly its distressed financial condition. The Old Colony and Newport was housed in the building still standing in Kneeland Street, a good station then, familiar to South Shore suburbanites and to patrons of the popular Fall River Line. The Boston and Albany ran in and out beneath the twin sheds that fronted on Beach Street opposite the United States Hotel. There were two day expresses for New York, *via* Springfield, one leaving at nine A. M., the other at three P. M. Both these flyers carried drawing-room cars and made the run in eight hours. The knell of the Boston and Providence station in Pleasant Street had been sounded by the extension of Columbus Avenue to Park Square. It was on the eve of being torn down, and work on the finest railway structure in the United States had just been started on the westerly side of the new street. The Boston and Providence ran four trains each way between these cities in 1872. Besides these, there was the steamboat express of the Providence line, and two day

expresses for New York, which, like those of the Albany, ran on an eight-hour schedule.

The Cunard line maintained a weekly service with Liverpool, calling at Queenstown. One had the choice of the staunch and swift mail-steamers



BOSTON AND PROVIDENCE R. R. STATION, PLEASANT STREET

Malta, Olympus, Siberia, Batavia, Hecla, and Samaria; and, under captains picked by Mr. McIver's judicious care, they were certain to make their destination in ten or twelve days' time.

The traveller arriving in Boston in these days found some of the best hotel accommodations in the country. There was Young's, the United States,

the Revere, and the Tremont, all deservedly famous. Other well-known establishments were the American, the largest of the local hostelryes and the recognized headquarters of the shoe and leather



THE TREMONT HOUSE

trade, the Adams, the Marlboro' and the St. James at the South End. Then, too, there were the "French Flat" houses, among which the Berkeley, the Boylston, the Pelham, and the Continental were preëminent. But the hotel *par ex-*

cellence was the Parker House, the Mecca of all who rejoiced in good living. It was Artemus Ward who declared that Harvard College was “pleasantly situated in the bar-room of Parker’s.” However much we may question the good taste or the



THE PARKER HOUSE IN 1872

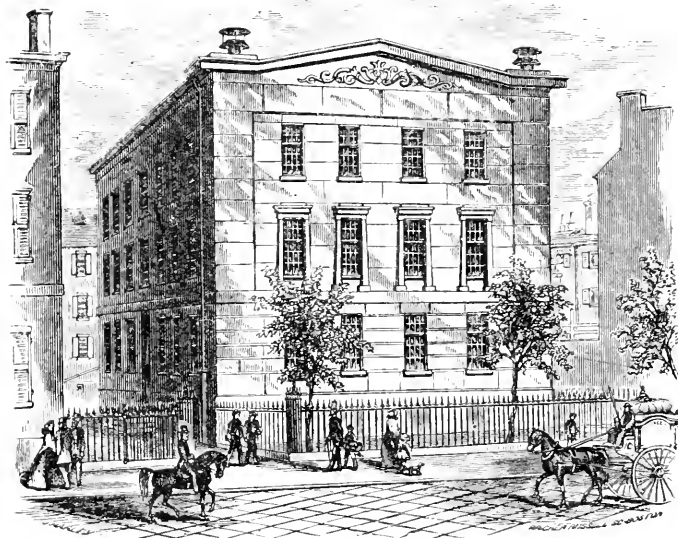
geographical accuracy of this statement, it is worth quoting as an evidence of the popularity of the School Street hotel forty years ago. A New York journal in jocose mood declared at this time that in Boston “nearly all the hotels have

graveyards attached to them. Whether these burial places are the natural result of the too rich cuisine of the various establishments, or whether people who do not pay their hotel bills are summarily disposed of in Boston, is a matter we leave to conjecture." It must be admitted that the Parker House looking out upon the tombs of King's Chapel yard, the Tremont overlooking the old Granary, the Pelham hard by the burying-ground in the Common, and the St. James adjoining the cemetery near Blackstone Square, gave some color to the genial suggestion of the New York editor.

The schools of Boston were deservedly famous, and served as models for the rest of the nation. The new Girls' High and Normal on West Newton Street was regarded then as a splendid example of a modern school edifice. The Boston Latin and English High occupied jointly the granite building on Bedford Street that was removed years since to allow the extension of Harrison Avenue. Dr. Francis Gardner presided over the Latin, and it is fitting that mention should be

made of him as a picturesque figure in the educational life of the city, a strong austere man who pointed the way to duty with his rod.

Boston in 1872 was still a Protestant community. The Catholic churches were thriving, and



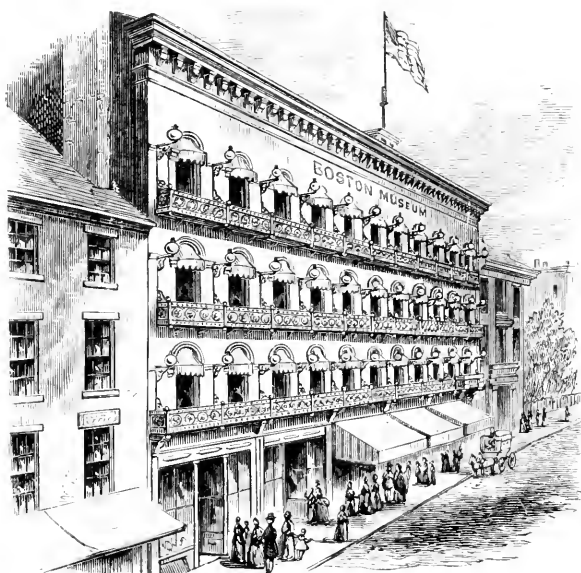
THE BOSTON LATIN AND ENGLISH HIGH SCHOOL, BEDFORD STREET

gave undoubted promise of the vast growth which was in store for them; but the religious creeds of the fathers were still the dominant factors in local religious life. The Reverend W. H. H. Murray of Adirondack fame held the Park Street pulpit;

Dr. Fulton of bellicose tendencies preached to immense throngs in Tremont Temple. The Old South society still occupied their meeting-house at the corner of Washington and Milk, although contemplating an early removal to the Back Bay. Dr. Blagden was the pastor here, assisted by Dr. Manning. Phillips Brooks was the new rector of Trinity Church, and his parishioners gathered from far and near to worship in the picturesque old pile on Summer Street. James Freeman Clarke, Edward Everett Hale, Rufus Ellis, Dr. Neale, Dr. Herrick, Dr. Miner, Dr. Vinton, and Dr. Bartol, were a few of the many notable clergymen prominent in Boston at this time. The South End churches were at the height of their prosperity. Dr. Webb at the Shawmut Congregational had perhaps one of the wealthiest and most substantial constituencies in the city.

In its issue of June 22, 1872, *Harper's Weekly* remarked, "The visitor, especially if he is a New Yorker, will be curious to know how the Thespian art flourishes in the ancient stronghold of the Puritans. The fact remains that Bos-

ton, in this year of grace 1872, has five theatres in successful operation, with numerous halls devoted to itinerant entertainments more or less calculated to corrupt ye youth of ye town. The Boston,



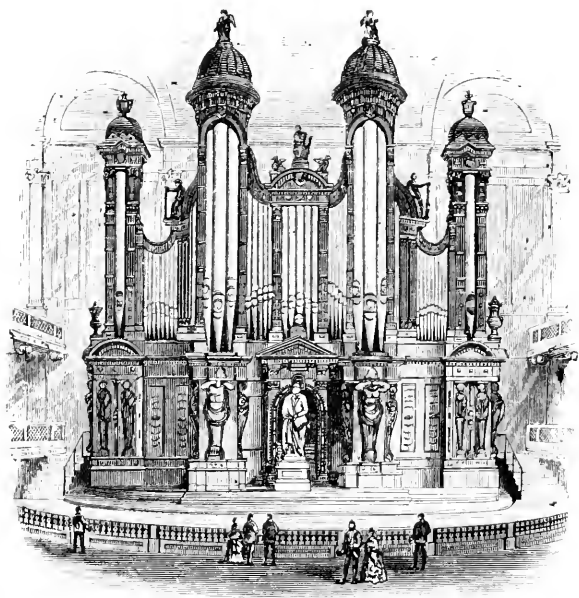
THE BOSTON MUSEUM

the Museum, and the Globe are well-managed establishments. The Museum and the Globe have most excellent stock companies, and put their pieces upon the boards with an elegance and fitness of appointments unknown elsewhere out-

side of New York. The Boston has a passable stock company, depending chiefly upon stars, foreign and domestic. It is at this house that Edwin Booth and Joseph Jefferson always play on their professional visits, no other theatre in the city being sufficiently spacious to hold their audiences. It was here Mr. Feechter made his *début* in blonde wig and broken English. If Bunker Hill is 'the place where Warren fell,' the Boston Museum is certainly the place where another Warren may be said to have risen and culminated. Mr. William Warren is, and has been for many years, the leading card at the Museum. The visitor is advised to go and see him, especially when he plays Triplet in 'Masks and Faces.' The Howard Athenæum is the democratic house of the ballet girl and the gymnast, and the refuge of the forlorn negro minstrel. The St. James is somewhat difficult to characterize. Ever since its opening night, some six or seven years since, it has carried on a sort of feverish flirtation with the public, but has not succeeded in winning any lasting favor."

It is always good to see ourselves as others see

us, and Bostonians could hardly complain of this characterization of their playhouses by the New York weekly. Mention might well have been made of the wax-works and curios in the Museum



THE GREAT ORGAN IN MUSIC HALL

lobby, which drew many a rigid Puritan to the threshold of the pit. The great organ in Music Hall was the admiration of all those who visited the city in 1872. It played its part melodiously in the concerts of the Handel and Haydn Society,

and of the newly formed Apollo Club. It looked down in silent dignity upon the audiences which attended the Lyceum and Old Bay State lecture courses, and in silent contempt upon the bazaars, fairs, and shows, which invaded its classic domain.

The *Boston Almanac* concluded its "Chronicle of Events" for 1872 in the following words: "The last days of the year were the coldest of the same time within the past fifty years. Great storms, great fires, disasters by railway, and shipwrecks, were unusually numerous during the year." It might have been added that intense heat as well as intense cold had been experienced, the summer being almost unprecedented in the soaring flights of the thermometer and in the violence and destructiveness of the electrical storms. On November 11, inspired by the gruesome Ellis murder, the *Boston Globe* discussed editorially "Epidemics of Crime," asserting that "the present seems to be one of the periods only too familiar to students of the morbid anatomy of human society when crime becomes at once more prevalent and malignant than usual." The phenomenon that

interested the Globe inspired numerous psychical dissertations on the part of the American press. There were scandals, horrors, and disasters in plenty, as one may realize by turning the disreputable files of the *Day's Doings* and the *Police News*. These sheets should have reaped a rich harvest in 1872, as they encountered little competition, the Yellow Press being then a thing unborn. The enormities of the Tweed Ring were agitating the public mind in 1872, and the Credit Mobilier scandals were a universal topic of discussion, as they were sure to be in the heat of the presidential campaign. People seemed conscious that the time was "out of joint"; business men were feverish and worried, although few suspected how swiftly their affairs were drifting into panic and disaster.

But the year 1872 will always recall to the Bostonian the more cheerful recollections of the World's Peace Jubilee, which crowded the city with guests from all parts of the Union. Imbedded in the sandy wastes of the Back Bay, the hideous Coliseum Building was packed daily by enthusias-



THE BOSTON PEACE JUBILEE.—COLISEUM, AT HUNTINGTON AVENUE AND IRVINGTON STREET

tic thousands, among whom were the President of the United States, and Mr. Greeley, his Democratic opponent in the approaching national campaign. The singing of Madame Peschka-Leutner will always be an inspiring memory, and the appearance of Herr Johann Strauss was a notable event. Our vanity was piqued by the fine playing of the great band of the British Grenadier Guard, under Dan Godfrey's direction, and by the no less masterly work of the other foreign organizations, the band of the Kaiser Franz Regiment of the German Army and that of the Garde Republicaine from Paris. But it was the Anvil Chorus that took the public ear, and while the cannon roared, the bands crashed, the huge chorus labored, and the perspiring firemen swung their heavy hammers, the windows of quiet dwellings beyond the Charles rattled in their casements. Who can forget the daily soaring of the great balloon, and the side-shows rampant with freaks and monstrosities that girdled this vast ugly temple dedicated to Peace and Apollo?

Boston in 1872 covered a territory of less than

thirty square miles, and embraced a population of 250,000 souls. Roxbury had been annexed in 1868, Dorchester in 1870, while Charlestown, Brighton, and West Roxbury still maintained their separate existences. William Gaston was Mayor, supported by an Aldermanic Board of twelve members and a Common Council numbering sixty-four.

It is only fair to say that the baneful influence of politics was to some extent discernible in the administration of our civic affairs thirty-seven years ago, and the disastrous events of 1872 served to lay bare instances of inefficiency that had their root in conditions that have always existed under democratic systems of government. But the city fathers were for the most part men of standing and responsibility in the community, and Boston suffered more from their narrow conservatism and conscientious economies than from anything suggestive of that gross evil the modern name for which is "graft."

Boston in 1872 took pride in her civic administration, and was inclined to be thankful that she

was not as other cities. It needed no argument to convince her that her schools and public institutions were beyond compare, that the intelligence and virtue of her people and the honor of her courts would ever be a barrier to such scandals as convulsed New York, and that the solid structures that lined her streets, and the alert and well-equipped fire department that was ever ready at her call, were proof against disasters of the sort which had overwhelmed Chicago. It is sad to think that this complacency of the good old city was after all but the pride that goes before a fall. However strong the bulwark of civic virtue that preserved her from moral contamination, the old year was not to be rung out until her vaunted fire department had been weighed in the balance and found wanting. The dismal scenes of Chicago were to be in a measure reënacted among the granite palaces of her merchants, and, depleted in purse, wounded in pride, but with faith in herself unabated, she was to be the recipient of condolences and of tenders of aid from a great-hearted and sympathizing nation.

THE OUTBREAK OF
THE GREAT FIRE OF 1872
AND HOW IT BECAME A
CONFLAGRATION

THE paid fire department at this time consisted of four hundred and seventy-five men, supervised by a committee of the city government, and directly commanded by a chief engineer and fifteen assistants, who were appointed by the City Council. The force comprised both call and permanent members, the former class largely predominating, and was organized into twenty-one steam fire-engine companies, seven hook-and-ladder companies, and eleven detached hose companies. East Boston, South Boston, and Roxbury had each three engines. Six were located in the city proper, and precisely the same number in the sparsely settled Dorchester district, which had made this ample provision for itself on the eve of annexation.

The fire department not only commanded the public confidence, but was the most popular branch of the city's equipment. Only twelve years had elapsed since the hand-tubs had been succeeded by the steam-engines, and thousands of men walked the streets who had at one time or another borne an active part in the old-time establishment. The firemen's parade was always one of the events of the year, and the long array of brightly painted and highly polished engines, with their gleaming stacks stuffed with flowers, the trucks and hose-carriages draped with gorgeous bunting, and the trim files of red-shirted firemen, preceded by foremen with silver trumpets, were always received with boundless delight and enthusiasm. The different companies did not rely alone upon their numbers for identification, for every steamer, hose-carriage, and truck bore some distinctive name, many of them legacies from hand-engine times. The Boston schoolboy of 1872 still recalls with a flush of the old enthusiasm Mazeppa 1, Eagle 3, Barnicoat 4, Melville 6, Northern Liberty 8, Maverick 9, Warren 12,

Tremont 13, and many another good title famous in many a hard-fought contest with the flames.

On Saturday, October 26, 1872, the rain was driving in sheets before a fierce autumnal gale. If we had looked into the fire department office in City Hall late on the afternoon of this stormy day, we should have found a group of fifteen strong weather-beaten men in earnest consultation. This was the Board of Engineers of the Boston Fire Department, which had been convened by Chief Damrell, "to decide upon a course of action in case of fire during the present time in which the horses were stricken with the distemper that was so prevalent." The situation was indeed serious, and the inroads of the epidemic had played havoc with trade and with the public convenience and comfort. Some of the horse-railways had discontinued running, while others maintained a lame and infrequent service. Teaming except by oxen was almost at a standstill, and but for the latent sense of humor in the American character the situation would have seemed blue enough. Employees and truckmen vied with one another in

manning heavy drays by hand-power, and some concerns added gayety to these troubled days by hiring brass bands, which headed gangs of tugging men, playing lively marching tunes. So far as the fire department was concerned, the conditions afforded no opportunity for the play of humor. The horses were nearly all down in their stalls, and the question was how best to insure a prompt response of the heavy apparatus to alarms of fire. It is not clear whether the hiring or impressment of sound horses was even considered in the meeting to which we refer, but the final conclusion of the whole matter was that all use of horses should be for the time suspended. It was voted that the strength of each company should be temporarily doubled by the enlistment of volunteers, and that drag-ropes should be furnished each engine-house for the purpose of drawing the apparatus by hand-power. But while strengthening the personnel of the department, the engineers voted to suspend the running card and to decrease the number of engines responding to alarms. Under the running card then in force, from four to six

steamers responded to each box in the downtown section, but the new assignment adopted at this meeting reduced the number to one. It was provided that the hose-jumpers should alone be taken out on the first call, the engines to follow in case of a second alarm. We cannot now determine the motives that inspired the suspension of the running card, but its practical effect was to decrease the efficiency of the department by eighty per cent for the first five or ten minutes of every fire. To minimize the delay in the response of the steamers, it was voted to notify the police, in all cases where the fire was above the third story, to pull the second alarm, as soon as the first had ceased striking, without waiting for an order from an engineer. The meaning of this is of course clear enough: a fire in the lower part of a building might be controlled by hydrant streams; above that level the power furnished by the engines would be a necessity. After voting Steamers 16 and 18 temporarily out of service, and providing for some minor details, the meeting adjourned. The storefronts were lighted and the gas-lamps were flick-

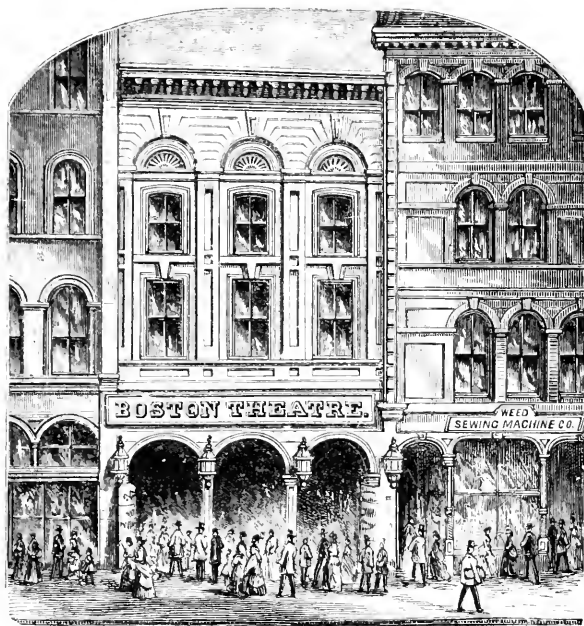
ering above the flooded streets when the engineers passed out of City Hall after completing what proved to be a most serious blunder, none the less deplorable because the work of brave and conscientious men. It must be confessed that a week after the adoption of the new system it appeared to be working well enough. The fire-fiend seemed inclined to stay his hand, and when the city bells boomed out their call of danger there was a mad rush of sturdy citizens towards the engine-houses to man the ropes. The long lines of panting men with the hose-reels clattering at their heels were received with cheers, gibes, and laughter whenever they appeared on the crowded streets. The city was enlivened by the workings of the new rules, and many a merchant whose fortune was soon to disappear in ashes looked out with delight upon these vivid reminders of the good old days when he "ran with the machine."

It was very evident during the first week of November that the epidemic had spent its force and that matters were rapidly mending. The street railways had reëstablished an efficient serv-

ice, and had eighty per cent of their animals at work. The streets of the wholesale district resumed their normal appearance, and truckmen and cabmen again began to ply their trades. But the fire department still ran by hand. The horses were adjudged unfit for their peculiarly arduous work, and the question of hiring was not even then considered. But, as we have said, the fire-fiend seemed inert, the weather held still and mild, and when the morning of November 9 broke with all the golden promise of a glorious Indian Summer day, it was remarked by the firemen on duty in the city proper that no alarm had called them out for four long days and nights. The soft land breeze that prevailed throughout the day went down with the sun, and the leafless trees on the Common displayed their still and delicate tracery against a cloudless and glowing west. With the gathering of dusk the rising moon diffused its silvery light over town and bay, and, as darkness deepened, the gas-lamps began to flare in the shadowy streets. Silence reigned in the wholesale district, but Washington Street, deserted for a time, began

to fill again with the usual crowds of a Saturday night. The retail stores were soon thronged with week-end shoppers, and as the clock of the Park Street Church tolled forth the hour of seven, the malls of the Common were dotted with strollers tempted thither by the unseasonable mildness of the weather. The entrances of the theatres were flaming with gas-lights, and the enthusiastic vanguard of the evening's audiences lounged in the lobbies or sauntered in to their seats. At the Museum, the bill-boards announced that the tragedy of *Othello* would be essayed by the full strength of the popular company. The crowd was thin about the Boston Theatre, where the regular company was advertised to appear in *Nobody's Daughter* and *Paddy Miles's Boy*, but the great house had been filled during the afternoon to witness Charlotte Cushman in her soul-stirring impersonation of Meg Merrilies. This tragic queen had held the Boston stage throughout the week, playing in *Macbeth* and *Henry VIII* as well as in *Guy Mannering*, and this evening's entertainment was regarded as a tame conclusion

to a notable six-days' run. It was about the Globe, farther up Washington Street, that the public interest seemed to centre, for Mr. E. A. Sothern was to be the star of the evening in *David Gar-*



THE BOSTON THEATRE IN 1872

rick, with the *Boorampooter* as a curtain-raiser. The South End cars halted here to discharge their heavy freights, while Mr. Hathorne's coaches also made their modest contributions to what was clearly to be a crowded house.

The corner of Washington and Winter streets was a busy centre, as it has been for long years since, and here a sudden halt was noticed in the movement uptown. What had served to chain the interest of a half-dozen listless strollers soon drew a hundred to the spot, where all were gazing down the narrow, dimly-lighted length of Summer Street, at the lower end of which the fitful glowing of a rapidly increasing cloud of smoke told of the outbreak of fire. One by one, or in small knots, the beholders broke from the throng and made their way down by Hovey's and Trinity Church towards the Hartford and Erie Depot. There was no outcry, or, if there was, it was lost in the rumble of wheels, the jangle of horse-car bells, and the usual sounds of a city street. The first arrivals from Washington Street saw at a glance that the modern five-story granite block on the southeasterly corner of Kingston and Summer streets was on fire. Great masses of yellow smoke poured from every crevice of the Mansard roof. The curtains were drawn behind the broad expanse of glass that lined the street-floor, while midway between sidewalk

and eaves a brass corner sign shone faintly in the light of the street-lamp below. Those who passed close under the threatened structure could see the



LOOKING DOWN WASHINGTON STREET FROM WINTER
BEFORE THE FIRE

reflection of angry flames upon the window-panes on the other side of Kingston Street, and then the attention of those who had been gazing up to the smoking roof was called to the ruddy glare that

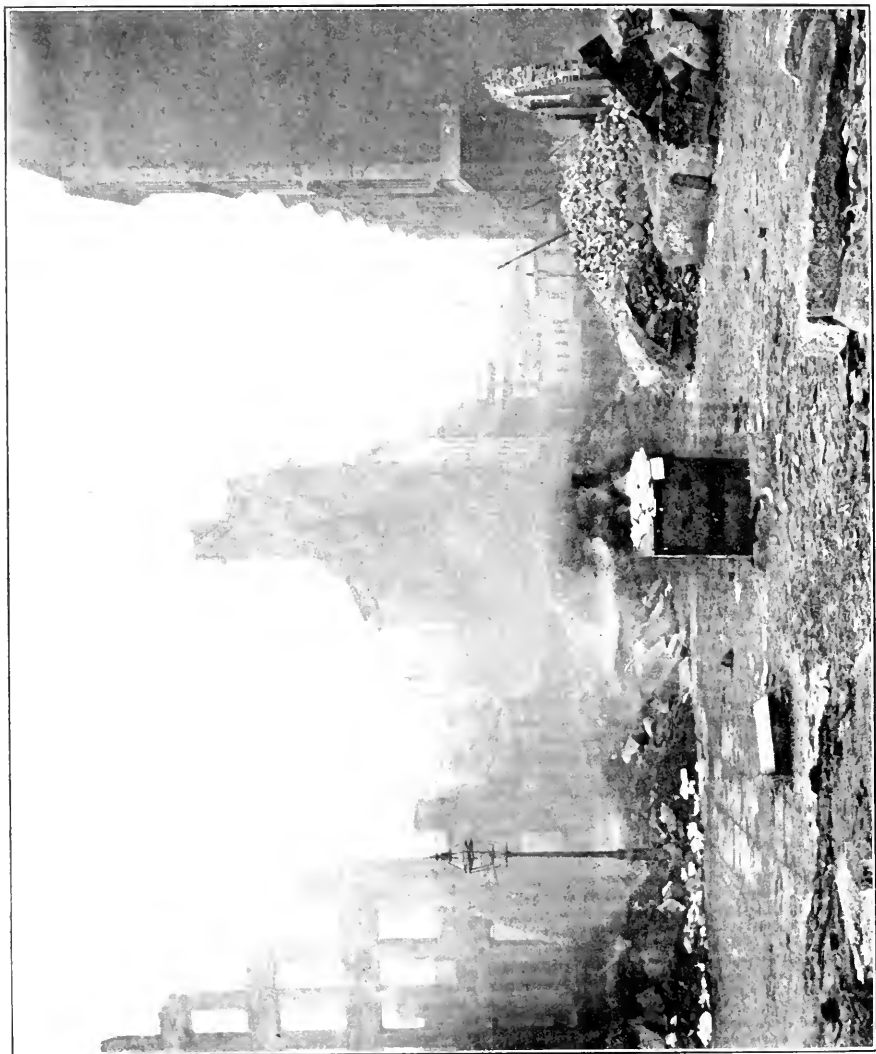
was spreading through the basement. It was clear that the flames had secured a lodgment upon every floor, and that the building was on fire from cellar to attic.

But some time before it had become visible in Washington Street, the fire had been detected by the dwellers in Kingston Street. In 1872, with the exception of a business structure at the corner of Summer Street and another adjoining, in process of erection, the whole westerly side of Kingston, between Summer and Bedford streets, was still occupied by dwellings. One or two old residents still clung to their roof-trees, but the march of business was accomplishing its certain work, and most of these old-time homes had deteriorated into lodging-houses, as the first step in retreat before the encroachments of trade. The granite block in which the fire originated extended along Kingston Street for one hundred feet to an alley in the rear. Across the alley stood another five-story structure built of brick, which formed at that time the southerly outpost of Boston's wholesale district. Beyond, along the edge of the South Cove, lay a

faded reminder of what had once been a pleasant residential section, the old swell-front houses given over to lodgers and undermined in their basements by the shops of petty traders.

From the windows of the Kingston Street lodging-houses scores of eyes beheld the incipient stages of a catastrophe that was to become memorable in our civic annals. The fire first appeared shining in the basement of the granite block. It was decreed by fate that it should break out within a few feet of the pine-sheathed elevator-well that pierced the building for its entire height, from the basement floor to the great wooden Mansard roof. It was seemingly but a moment from the first appearance of the flames until a sudden flaring through a small window in the elevator-shaft proclaimed that they had begun their upward march. The excited men who first crossed Kingston Street into the alley declared that it was a matter of seconds rather than of minutes before the small windows in the elevator shaft were blown out at the third story and the glass sent rattling and clinking to the pavement

below. Then a brilliant reflection, spreading through the great rooms, indicated that the elevator partitions on the second and third floors were burning through. There was a brief hesitancy in the upward movement at this point, then a new rush followed, and those looking out from open windows in the Kingston Street houses could hear the fire roaring like a blast as it swept up the shaft to the roof. As floor after floor became brilliant with the threatening light, and as the masses of smoke drifting lazily into the air grew lurid and became spangled with sparks, the good people of Kingston Street bethought themselves of their danger, and, while some prepared to pack their belongings, others began to concoct private measures for the protection of their property. In the street the question was asked by one of another why the firemen did not appear. A night clerk inquired from a neighboring window if the alarm had been given, and some one shouted an affirmative response. Anxious queries regarding the alarm were interspersed with harsh criticism of the sluggishness of the fire department. No one knew the where-



LOOKING DOWN KINGSTON STREET FROM SUMMER, SHOWING RUINS OF BUILDING FIRST BURNED
AND DWELLINGS ON WESTERLY SIDE OF KINGSTON STREET FROM WHICH FIRE WAS FIRST SEEN

abouts of the nearest signal-box; every one was content with his neighbor's assurance that the alarm had probably been given. Of such men was the gathering crowd composed, and this event must go down in history as one crisis in which Boston's citizens woefully failed her.

It is clear that the police were not neglectful of their duty; but the same fate that fixed the spot for the outbreak of the fire also decreed an hour when no policeman was near. When Officer Page, attracted first by the shouting of boys and then by the light of the fire, hurried up Lincoln Street and opened the alarm-box at the corner of Bedford, he was but a few seconds ahead of two of his colleagues, who came running in from other directions. Without waiting to locate the fire, Page opened the box and pulled down the slide. Acting under the special instructions of the Board of Engineers, he gave the second alarm before closing the box.

In all the confused, tumultuous testimony offered by excited men, it is difficult to figure time as it elapsed in the vicinity of Kingston and Summer

streets between seven and half-past on this fatal evening. Two conspicuous and widely separated events alone enable us to estimate the delay that ensued between the first discovery of the fire and the taking of the first step towards calling out the fire-extinguishing machinery of the city.

It chanced that evening that a schooner was being warped through the Prison Point draw-bridge of the Eastern Railroad in Charlestown. Two police officers interested themselves in the affair, fearing that the 7.10 train from Boston might be delayed. As the bridge was closed and the line reopened, they found that the task had been well done, the depot clock reading eight minutes after seven. At this moment, looking towards Boston, they saw the glowing of the smoke-cloud, and remarked one to the other that there was a fire in the city.

The fire-alarm operator in the dome of the City Hall was engrossed in his paper on this pleasant evening. He was called to his feet by the clicking of his instruments registering an alarm, and as he put the machinery in motion which sent

the news clanging through the fire-houses of the city, he lifted his eyes and saw the light of the flames. He then turned to his clock and entered in his register an alarm from Box 52 at 7.24 P. M. Astounding as is the fact, we are compelled to believe that the fire was visible from a point two miles distant a full quarter of an hour before its existence was made known to the fire department of Boston.

Fifty-two was known among the city firemen as "a bad box." Not only was it located among tall buildings capped with wooden Mansard roofs and crowded with costly and inflammable stocks, but the water-supply in this vicinity was notoriously inadequate to meet conflagration conditions. The old six-inch pipe in Summer Street was large enough for hand-engine days, when this was a region of dwellings, many of them detached and standing within shady yards; but in 1872 this six-inch pipe had been reduced to five by rust, and was wholly insufficient to feed any number of the powerful steam-engines with which the department was equipped. With a full knowledge of

the conditions existing, the Board of Engineers had arranged that Box 52 should call out every engine in the city proper on the first alarm. This ensured the presence of six steamers on the fire-ground within ten minutes of the opening of the signal-box; and by running long lines of hose from Winthrop Square and Bedford Street, and by utilizing the reservoir in Church Green, it was planned to minimize the draft on the Summer Street main and develop a powerful attack upon every fire in its incipency. More than once threatening fires had been controlled in this section by the prompt arrival and wise distribution of the apparatus.

We have noted that the fire of November 9, 1872, broke out under conditions that made for its rapid spread. There had been an incomprehensible delay in giving the alarm, and now as never before the city was dependent upon the prompt rallying of its fire department. But between the desired end and its accomplishment stood the fatal regulations of October 26. Only two engines left their quarters on the first alarm, and

Number 10 went out against orders, inspired by the threatening glare. Steamers 4 and 8 left their houses as the second alarm began to strike, but it took the third, which was sent out at 7.34, to start the rest of the downtown force. All of this apparatus was drawn by hand.

Chief Engineer Damrell counted the alarm from his house in Temple Street, and hurried on foot over the hill and down Park Street, amazed at the great light that loomed before him, but all unconscious of the awful dimensions of the battle upon which he was entering. The third alarm was sounding as he gained the corner of Kingston Street, and his first act was to order the "general," summoning the entire fire-fighting force of the city from the Charles to Neponset River. At 7.45 the ominous "three twelves" began to boom forth from a hundred belfries. The Chief found himself, ten minutes after receiving the alarm, confronting a great structure that from sidewalk to roof had become a living furnace. Instead of the heavy force that under happier auspices should have been in position about the threatened corner, he found

Steamer 7 battling unaided against the rising conflagration, although Number 4 was just coming in, drawn at a slow trot by an exhausted group of men and boys. Steamer 10 turned into Summer Street a moment later, and her line was run off promptly from the corner of Arch Street. Two or three hose companies were also on the ground, but with the low water-pressure prevailing they were of no more value than an equal number of buckets. It is on record that the men of Hose-Company Number 8 did force their way up one flight into the burning building, but after playing a weak hydrant stream for a few minutes, the onrush of flames swept them down the stairs and into the street. Steamer 4 attempted to hold the hydrant at the corner of Kingston and Summer streets, and did so for a time despite the bombardment of exploding granite and the awful heat that threatened to melt the suctions. Then a huge block of granite came crashing to the sidewalk and broke their connections. As the engine was drawn from its dangerous position by brave men who took their lives in their hands, the flames burst

forth in fury from the upper stories of the brick block south of the alley-way on Kingston Street, and the firemen working within its walls were withdrawn none too soon. At the same time the dormers of the Kingston Street dwellings began to burn, while smoke rose from the Mansard roofs on the northerly side of Summer Street, and bright jets of flame flickered from under their wooden eaves. At ten minutes of eight all the belated engines of the city proper had at length arrived, and their hose was stretched in the streets.

When Chief Engineer Damrell beheld the danger that threatened on the corner of Summer and Otis streets, he realized the full gravity of the crisis. He saw in that corner the key to the situation and that it must be held if a general conflagration was to be averted. Engine 4, as we have seen, had been driven from its point of vantage, but Engine 9 reported unexpectedly in Church Green, having crossed the ferry from East Boston on the second alarm instead of waiting for the general. No infringement of department rules was ever more gratefully pardoned than this forward zeal

on the part of the East Boston company. Attempts were made to play upon the smouldering roofs from the street, but because of the fierce heat prevailing between the buildings, and because of the lack of power in the streams, these efforts were quickly abandoned. Lines of hose were carried up ladders from Otis Street and over the stairways from Summer Street, but the firemen gasping in the smoke of the upper stories found almost no pressure at their nozzles. The rusty six-inch pipe was unequal to the draft upon it, and when an engine maintaining with difficulty a single stream was seized upon by a hose company for a second line, one fair stream was ruined and two feeble ones took its place. The Chief and his assistants shut down engines at some points in order to get more power at others, but this meant that men fighting desperately in the heat and smoke high above the streets found themselves suddenly deprived of their only means of preservation. Appeal after appeal came down to the enginemen for more water, but the flow in the mains had almost stopped and the steamers fretted angrily at their

HARPER'S WEEKLY

A

JOURNAL OF CIVILIZATION

Vol. XVI—No. 831

NEW YORK, SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 1872

WITH A SUPPLEMENT
FOR FIFTY CENTS



BOSTON. "INTO THE JAWS OF DEATH"

fruitless task. None but those engaged in that fierce half-hour's struggle at the corner of Otis and Summer streets can ever know what a brave, hopeless, and heart-breaking stand it was. The city clocks struck eight. The scene at the Kingston Street corner had become awful beyond description; and as the jagged walls came thundering down in utter ruin, great billows of flame surged into the air and fairly lapped the granite fronts across the way. The building on the westerly corner of Kingston Street began to burn, while the fire, working around from the structure in which it originated, had ignited the block adjoining on the east. Worse than all, the firemen on Otis Street were losing ground, and the flames could be seen rippling in lurid waves along the ceilings of the upper stories. As floor after floor lighted up with the glare of the descending fire, dull explosions blew out the glass from superheated rooms. The Chief, having ordered a repetition of the general alarm and summoned the spare engines of the department to be brought to the scene, then despatched a messenger to the Western Union

Office in State Street to telegraph for aid to every city and town within a radius of fifty miles. And now the engines began to come thick and fast in response to the repeated alarms, forcing their way with clanging gongs through the excited crowds. But the last opportunity of the firemen had passed, a conflagration was under way, and could the entire fire department have then been massed in Summer Street by the wave of a magician's wand, it would have been of no avail.

II

THE LETTERS

II

THE LETTERS

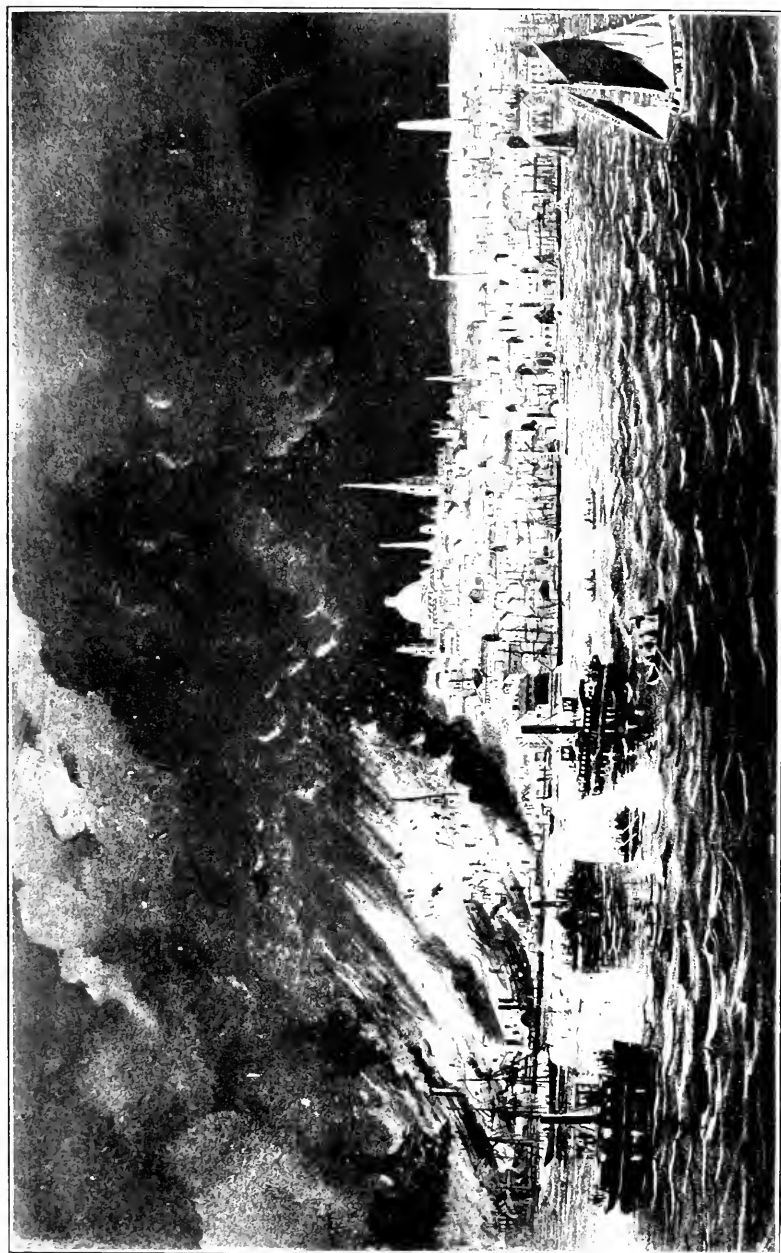
UNION CLUB

Boston, November 10, 1872.

DEAR HARRY, —

When I wrote you last week describing the torchlight procession of October 30th, and noting the satisfaction we all felt over the result of the election, I had no idea that the subject matter of my next would be of such a distressing character. I suppose that you are still in France and you will of course soon see in the Paris papers some account of the great calamity that has come to us here. As I sit writing in the Club, everything is in a turmoil, we are practically under martial law, while a small army of firemen from all over New England is still engaged in fighting fire among the smouldering ruins which cover some sixty or seventy acres of what was Boston's wholesale dis-

trict. Somewhere from 75 to 100 millions have disappeared in the conflagration, and God only knows how general business, bad enough at best, is to be influenced by this awful wiping-out of values. The fire broke out at half-past seven last evening, in a tall building at the corner of Summer and Kingston streets, which was used largely as a hoop-skirt manufactory. There appears to have been great delay in giving the alarm, the engines were delayed by lack of horses, and although no wind was stirring, the fire spread rapidly, crossed Summer Street, and entered both Devonshire and Otis streets. It also burned eastward down Summer street to Church Green, and from there swept down to Broad Street and along High and Purchase streets towards Fort Hill. In a word, it has taken pretty much everything within the territory bounded by Washington Street on the west, Summer Street on the south, the water, Oliver Street, and Liberty Square on the east, and State Street on the north. The Old South was saved, and the fire was held at Milk Street on the line between Devonshire and Washington. It was fin-



BOSTON IN FLAMES

ally brought under control in Congress and Kilby streets this afternoon, after burning through the post office, in the Merchants' Exchange building.

I was up all last night, and but for the fact that I know how anxious you will be to have details of



VIEW OF PARK STREET, SHOWING THE UNION CLUB HOUSE

the matter at the earliest possible moment, I should be now in my bed. I am going to throw off this scrawl in the hope that I may catch the mail which goes out by the Malta Tuesday, although be-

cause of the burning of the post office I don't know just what will happen to our mails for the next day or two.

You must know, then, that I was booked to go last evening (Saturday) to the Globe, with your Cambridge cousin and some others from that town, to see Sothern. I had *Dundreary* in mind, a very amusing piece as you know, and I only learned in the morning that *David Garrick* was the bill. As I have seen rather too much of that silly play, and as I could n't imagine Sothern as adapted to the part, I gave up my ticket and concluded to take tea with Freddie and Maria at the South End and go out to Roxbury early in the evening. We had hardly risen from the table before some young people dropped in on my nephews and nieces, and the piano was soon going and they were singing college songs and "Champagne Charley," "Up in a Balloon, Boys," and all that sort of thing. You know my habit of counting the fire-alarm, and several times I thought I heard the bell on the Methodist Church on Tremont Street. However, I could n't be sure, and I let

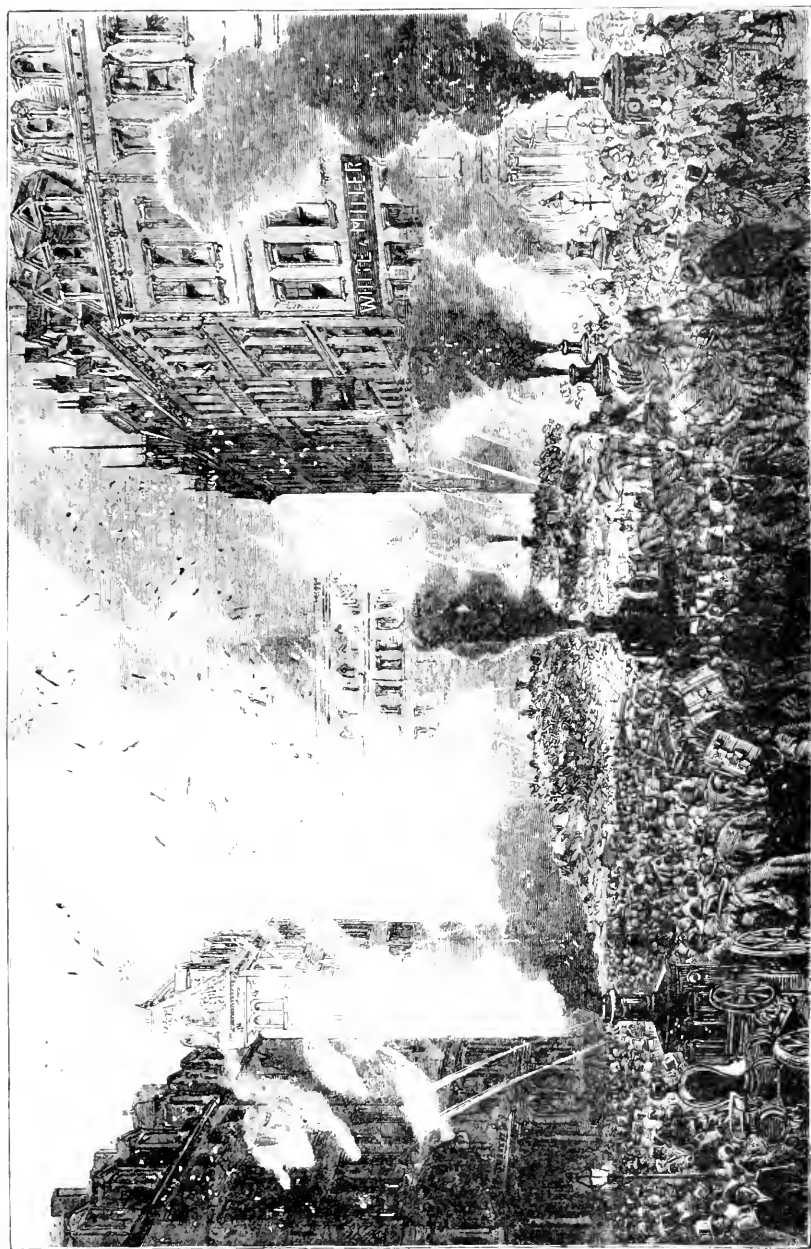
things go until there was a break in the uproar and I heard the bell again. I looked at the clock and saw that it was eight o'clock, and stepped to the door to look out. The sky was cloudless, the moon bright, but the loom of a big fire was unmistakable above the houses on the other side of the street. I thought it could n't be farther away than Dover Street, and so endeavored to arouse Freddie's enthusiasm for a run down Shawmut Avenue. But he had one of his confounded throats, was as blue as a whetstone, and could n't be budged. So I said good-night and started out alone. I met a policeman before reaching the corner, who informed me that the fire was at the corner of Bedford and Lincoln, that the "general" had been given and once repeated, and pointing to the sky with his cane ventured the statement that "they had got a good one this time." I then decided to take a car, but as there was nothing in sight on the avenue, I went through to Washington Street. The Metropolitan was running, of course, on "epizootic" time, and I don't know how long I waited, but others were waiting too. I let two cars

go by on which there was n't an inch of room, and when I finally squeezed on to a crowded platform I heard the bells striking again. There was a steamer right behind us, but, although we made wretchedly slow time, we gained on her, and at Dover Street she was not in sight. I thought that if the fire department was n't travelling any faster than that, there was a big chance for trouble before morning.

I jumped off at Essex Street, made my way into Bedford and found it crowded and roped off just below Chauncey. I met the secretary of one of the insurance companies, I can't think of his name, and he told me of the outbreak of the fire, that it had crossed Summer and was going down both sides of the street into Church Green, and that it looked like a bad night for his business. There was an engine from Dorchester just taking position in Chauncey Street at this time, and there was a ladder thrown against a block on the easterly side, from which I inferred that they were afraid of the fire coming through there. I managed to get through Chauncey into Summer, and then I could see the whole thing, both sides of Summer a roar-

ing furnace, the flames rolling out and seeming to meet in the middle of the street. I could n't see that the firemen were doing anything in the world, but a man who had been there from the start said that the fire was going fast into Winthrop Square and that the engines were fighting it on that side. There was a steamer at the corner of Arch Street, but her machinery was turning over very slowly and her hose was not filled. I asked the engineman what the trouble was, and he said the steamers were all "running away from their water" and that he was shut down by orders to lessen the draft upon the main. The only comfort I gained from him was that there was more water elsewhere, the supply in Summer Street being particularly bad. I went through Hawley and Franklin streets into Winthrop Square. I had no idea how bad things were until I arrived there and saw Beebe's block on fire from top to bottom. You remember what a splendid building that was, altogether the noblest mercantile block in Boston, and yet it burned as though built of slabs or shingles. It went up like tinder, although the fire departments of Cam-

bridge, Charlestown, and Somerville aided the city firemen in their desperate efforts to save it. Do you know that as I stood here I became conscious that a gale was blowing? At the South End there was hardly a breath of air, but now the fierce gusts, caused, I suppose, by the rising heat, howled and whistled around the corners and whirled the tops of the strongest streams of water into useless spray. The picture of that flaming palace and the red light of its destruction reflected upon the sea of upturned faces was a sight I shall never forget. I saw President Eliot of Harvard standing in the square, and it occurred to me that with Harvard's interest in city real estate he could not be in a happy frame of mind. He was with Mr. Brooks, the Rector of Trinity, and some other gentlemen whom I did n't recognize. Mr. Damrell, in his white hat, came fighting his way through the crowd, and I saw Mr. Eliot exchange a few words with him in passing, but don't know what comfort he got. I believed even then that the firemen fighting in the big open square would manage to keep the fire out of Franklin Street,



THE FIRE COMING INTO DEVONSHIRE STREET FROM WINTHROP SQUARE

and with this idea in mind I worked my way through the crowd into Federal Street and so around into Church Green. Here matters were in as bad a shape as in Winthrop Square; the



BEEBE BLOCK, WINTHROP SQUARE

building where the old church stood was all alight, and it looked to me as though the fire was already in Milton Place. The wind was very high here, seeming to suck in through the narrow streets

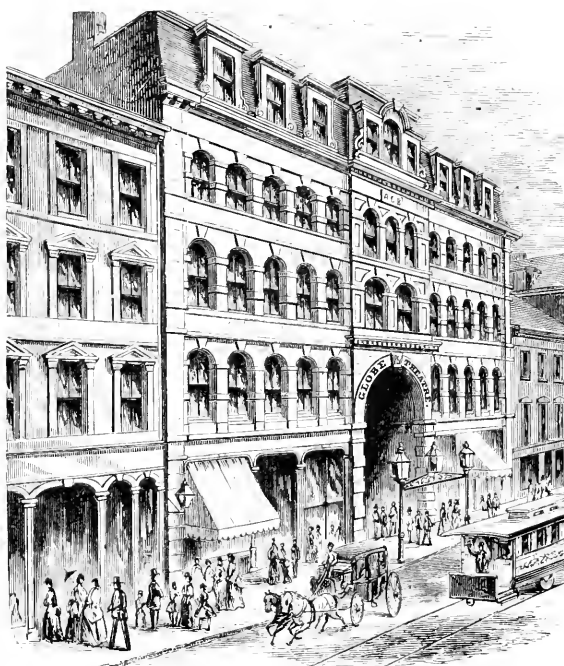
towards the fire, while the upper currents were from the west. The brands were driving about in every direction, huge blazing fragments, falling all over the streets and on the tops of the buildings. I stayed here until the walls of the Freeman's Bank building fell down and it became necessary to withdraw all the engines that had been drafting from the reservoir in front. For a few minutes there was n't a sign of a stream in any direction, and then some one said that the Hartford and Erie depot had caught from the sparks. I left things here in as desperate shape as they could well be, and went across into South Street and managed to push my way into Essex Street. Here the engines were in strong force, and although the brands and cinders were a serious menace to all the shingled shanties of the South Cove, it looked to me as though the fire would be stopped in this direction. The brick dwelling-houses in Bedford and Columbia streets were burning, but on the whole there seemed to be as much water as fire, and among the low buildings the streams hit the flames with telling effect. I was addressed very

politely by one of the firemen here, and found that he was our worthy painter from Roxbury, the same with whom you had that controversy about your bill last year. He runs with Warren 12, the successor of our old love, and was engaged with the rest of his company in getting a line of hose up on to a low shed in the rear of Bedford Street. I gave them a lift, and our friend was much surprised to hear that the fire had gone into Winthrop Square. He thought they had it all on this side and were "killing" it, as he said.

It occurred to me at this time that Ned and his party should know of what was going on, and I determined to go up to the theatre and see if I could get word in to them. I went up Beach Street to Washington, but found myself too late, as the crowd was pouring out of the theatre just as I got there. You should have seen the bewilderment on their faces as the hand-engine from Brookline village came clanking and jangling across Washington Street with crowded ropes. It was useless to try to find Ned in such a mob, so I made my way back through Beach Street and found the fire

pretty well beaten down all along the line from Kingston to South Street. Just here who should I stumble on but Freddie, bundled up like an Esquimau, although the evening was warm and I was hot from walking and elbowing through crowds. He said his bookkeeper had sent him a note by one of the Soldier's Messenger Corps stating that the whole business district was afire, and he was in a terrible state of the dumps. He said the night air would play the deuce with his throat, and was sure that his store was already gone. I told him that the fire was a good half mile from India Street, and at any rate he was insured. He did n't seem to think half a mile was much, and said he would n't give a d—n for the value of any insurance policy when this fire had burned itself out. We went down into Federal Street, where the Hartford and Erie property was making a great blaze without a drop of water being thrown upon it. There were two steamers in Federal Street, and it seemed to me that the firemen showed good judgment in playing upon the low buildings on the westerly side of the way.

We were here, I suppose, for an hour, until it became clear that the fire was not going much farther in this direction. Freddie kept worrying about his throat and his store, and finally I suggested that



THE GLOBE THEATRE, 1872

we go along Broad Street to India and have a look at his property. Then we found that we could n't get through, that the fire had come down to Broad from Church Green, and that Tileston's Wharf

was all afire. So back we went through Beach into Washington Street and down as far as Cunningham's furniture store, where we were blocked by the crowds. Freddie was for going into Brown's apothecary store on the corner of Bedford Street, to stock up on Bronchial Troches, I suppose, but the place was full and I finally got him headed up West Street towards the Common. It was a wonderful sight from Tremont Street to see the light of the fire reflected on the tree-tops, on the Park Street spire, and State House dome, and on the window-fronts of Beacon and Arlington streets. It looked at times as though both of these streets were all in flames. There were engines in Winter and Bromfield streets, and one from North Cambridge stood in front of the Park Street Church. She was whistling for coal, and the fireman was breaking up boxes with a hatchet for fuel. There was a great whistling going on in all directions, and you can imagine that it was no joke to get around the wide circle we were making with the coal-wagons. I suppose, too, that the horses were in poor condition.

The City Hall was all dark as we passed, and I finally got Freddie down through Water Street and Liberty Square into India Street, and showed him his store safe and sound. I told him he was an ass and that there was trouble enough around without his imaginary ones. Then he damned his bookkeeper for getting him out on a fool's errand and said this expedition might cost him his life, that it did n't make any difference if the store did go, there had n't been any money made there for years, etc., etc. I was pretty mad by this time, and headed him for Tremont Street, to load him on a car and send him home to his wife who loves him. Did you know he voted for Greeley? He says he did, and I dare say he tells the truth. We got into Broad Street and thence through Sturgis and Perkins streets into Congress, where we found the fire coming through from Federal Street and down from High. In some respects this was the most remarkable sight of the evening, and we stood watching the flames, without an engine or a fireman in sight. In Winthrop Square and Summer Street the buildings all caught on their

roofs, above the reach of the water, and burned down, but here every floor flashed up simultaneously and the flames shot out as though by explosive force. A building all dark would be a living furnace in five minutes. It was the effect, I suppose, of the tremendous heat making its way through the walls, but I never should have believed such a thing possible if I had n't seen it. It was fearful to have this sort of thing going on without a hand being raised to stop it. There were a lot of people about, but the street was not crowded. Lights were burning in many of the stores, and wagons with and without horses were backed up to the walks, and being hurriedly loaded with the most portable merchandise. I saw a crowd of men dragging a small safe down the street by a rope. I don't know where they got it, and they certainly did n't know where to go with it. We stayed here until the flames burst out of Spooner's big building, and as we turned to leave, an engine, from Salem I think, was just coming in. They did n't know much about the geography of Boston, and hesitated as to what they should do.

A man came running up in a terrible state of excitement, and begged them to put a stream upon his store. It was already afire, but he insisted that they could save it if they would, and promised them all the good things in this world and the next if they would only get to work. But the foreman, a picturesque old fellow in a long army overcoat, said he could n't do anything there with a single stream and did n't propose to lose his engine at that early stage of the game. So, in spite of bribes and threats, the machine rumbled off down the street, and a few minutes later I saw it standing in Bath Street while the men ran back up Congress unreeling the hose from their "jumper."

Just here a fellow came along who lives over Norfolk House way and who was in the Roxbury Council with us. You know how bad a memory I have for names, but I shall think of his before I close this letter. He had seen the episode I have just described, and while he agreed with me that the foreman did the right thing, he also thought that no kind of system was being followed in fighting the fire, that some one should be about

to tell these countrymen where to go and what to do, and not leave them to fly at things haphazard on the simple Irish plan of hitting a head when they saw it. He then suggested that we go up to City Hall and see what they were doing there. Freddie could n't be persuaded, so we left him in School Street bound for his car. Our old colleague informed me that the Chief Engineer had telegraphed all over the country for help, and that both sides of Franklin and both sides of Devonshire were now burning, and that the fire was half-way to Washington on one street and half-way to Milk on the other. The Hall was brilliantly lighted when we got there. There were a few people in the lobby, but we went up to the Mayor's office, where there were twenty or thirty prominent men, besides Chief Damrell and Mr. Gaston and his secretary. Every one was terribly excited, and you never heard anything like the crazy suggestions that were made by some of these people. As we came in, Mr. Burt, the postmaster, was telling the Mayor that if he did n't assert his authority and order the destruction of buildings

by powder, in the morning he would see the harbor from the windows of City Hall. The Mayor replied that he did not propose to have any conflict of authority, that the law placed the responsibility upon the shoulders of the Chief Engineer and his assistants, and that was the safest place to leave it. Then they all besieged Mr. Damrell, calling for powder. It was evident that the Chief was very nervous. He had no confidence in explosives, and he finally yielded, it seemed to me, entirely against his judgment. He sat down at the Mayor's desk and wrote out some orders authorizing the holder to blow up buildings, and then called for volunteers. Alderman Woolley spoke his mind and refused to have anything to do with the matter; but some dozen men came forward, and, after a hurried jabber as to where they should go and as to what they should do, they all went out like a regular mob. I made up my mind that if those fellows succeeded in putting their hands upon any powder the only safe place in the city for the average man would be in the centre of the Common. Is n't there something in Shakespeare

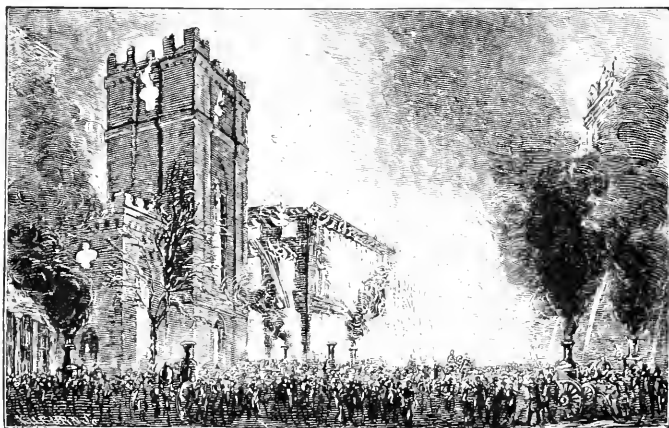
or the Bible about some chaps who “labored not wisely but too well”? It was some of that sort that went jumping down the stairs after General Burt. There was a lot of grumbling about the Mayor’s lack of energy, but God knows there was energy enough in that room without any surplus in him. He kept his wits, and that cannot be said of all the good men I met last night.

I heard the Mayor give instructions for calling out the militia and for sending to the Navy Yard for the marines; then the Chief said he was going up to the dome of the Hall, and two or three of us went with him. It was a great sight from there, a perfect mountain of smoke and flame, with the top of the Transcript building and the high blocks adjoining drawn sharp and black against it, while the Old South steeple and all the high spires and roofs behind us stood out wonderfully in the glare. The Chief said that the fire would not cross Washington Street, but that was all the encouragement he had to give us. Alderman Woolley asked me to go out with him, and we went downstairs together. An engine from Providence was just getting to work

in front of City Hall, and she was sending out the most ear-splitting shrieks for coal. The streets were filling with drays, wagons, and teams of all sorts. The business men were gathering fast, and even in School Street lights were burning in the offices and stores while swarms of people with books in their arms or loaded on barrows and hand carts were passing up the hill. I saw one fine old chap carrying what I suppose was his office cat. * Tabby was snarling and clawing, and I could n't tell whether the hair that flew was from the beast's back or from the old gentleman's beard. What a stupid brute a cat is! Our old black Mephistopheles was the only sensible feline I ever knew, and it is a pity he could n't have lived forever as an example to his kind. Passing up Tremont Street, we now found three steamers at the Park Street reservoir. The two new comers were from Worcester, and the enginemen told us that their suctions would n't connect with the city hydrants, that they had been chasing about for a reservoir and this was the best that they could do. A fire-department wagon was standing by, dump-

ing out coal, and Woolley took occasion to notify the driver of the needs of the Providence engine we had left in School Street. The Common gates were open and teams were already driving in, heavily loaded with all sorts of stuff. Woolley said that on Washington Street business men had invited the crowd in to help themselves to anything they wanted, and this gave roughs an excuse for helping themselves at other points without permission. As the police arrested every one found with goods in their hands, the innocent and the guilty were suffering alike. We went down Winter Street, managed to force our way up to the ropes, and the police let us through. The long, low building of the Mercantile Library was burning sullenly on one side of Summer Street, while on the other the old post office at the corner of Chauncey was almost consumed, and the fire had reached one or two doors farther up towards Washington Street. I don't know what time it was, but I suppose it must have been two or three o'clock, so you can see what slow progress the fire had been making on Summer Street. It had been at least six or seven hours in

covering the block between Kingston and Chauncey. It seems that the Mercantile Library building caught in the rear from the burning blocks in Franklin Street, and the fire from this ignited the stores on the southerly side of Summer Street.



NIGHT SCENE, SUMMER STREET, SHOWING TRINITY IN
FLAMES

There was a good force of steamers working about here, but the buildings all took fire in their cornices or roofs, and the streams would n't reach the threatened points, while the wasted water rushed a foot deep along the gutters.

I stood against the fence in front of Trinity Church, and it seemed to me that the fire would be

held in the Mercantile Library building. You remember how low it was and that the roof was flat. It did throw out an awful heat, though, and played the mischief with the buildings across the way. The water poured upon it didn't seem to be able to cool it down in the least. The eaves and dormers of Hovey's building were draped with blankets, which men from inside kept wetting, and that struck me as one of the brainiest things I had seen. I don't know how long I had been standing here, when the front doors of Trinity opened and I saw a man fastening them back. Then Mr. Brooks, unmistakable from his tall figure, passed out and moved off into the crowd. In a moment I noticed the red glow of fire through one of the front windows and concluded that the church had caught in the rear and the door had been opened to admit the firemen. But no one paid any attention to it, and in a few moments it was all of an angry glow inside and the smoke poured in clouds from the roof. I stepped across the street and found several of Hovey's people, some of whom I knew, standing in their doorway. I asked if I could be of

any assistance and they told me to step inside, said they were having a close rub of it, and did n't know how they would come out, now Trinity had caught. The employés I found there had been at work since midnight under the direction of members of the firm, and the newspapers cite what was done here as an example of what might have been accomplished had other merchants been as energetic and far-seeing. The whole theory of the defence here was to keep every vulnerable part of the building damp, — not wet but damp, — and you would be amazed to know what was accomplished by the use of buckets and even tin cups. The fellows out on the roof were real heroes, and they got an awful roasting up on that dizzy height. I am no topmast man, but I worked like a day-laborer in the basement, if I do say it. My job was to help load the buckets and ash-cans full of water on the elevator, which had just begun to run when I got there. Before that, the poor devils had been tugging all that water up five flights by hand. It was a maddening thing to try and fill the cans, because the water only trickled at the faucets, while

above the basement they could n't draw any water at all. I don't know how long I worked at this, but I believe I lived hours with every minute. At last, finding enough help at hand, I went up to the street floor just as the wall of the building next door came crashing down, broke our skylight to atoms, and let through a lot of flaming cinders right into the room. But they were ready for this, too, and with pails and cups they put out every fire as quick as it flamed up. Just at this minute a crowd of firemen came across the floor from Avon Street with a hose, and I took hold and gave them a lift up the stairs. Up we went the whole four flights, and when the men in the attic saw the hose, they fairly yelled with delight. The great danger now was from the windows that looked out into the well, they being separated by only six or seven feet from the building which was blazing next door. The firemen went straight to the window, then I heard the word "Play away, 2," passed down the stairs. The suspense was awful while we waited; it seemed as though the water was never coming; but when at last I felt the hose swell under my foot,

the firemen tore away the wet blankets at the window and pushed out the nozzle. Then we heard the stream tearing away the broken masonry across the well, a burst of steam blew back into the room, and we all knew that the fight was won. It was the most desperately exciting thing that I ever figured in, and the thought even occurred to me that perhaps I was a hero. At all events I had been working in the same building with some who deserved the title. I stepped out on the roof a minute and looked down into Summer Street, a veritable inferno, with old Trinity flaming like a torch just across the way. Going downstairs, I met one of our Roxbury engineers, and he said the store was safe.

I ran across Alderman Woolley right off in Washington Street, and he was arguing in a crowd of citizens and firemen, some of whom were cursing like demons. It seems the powder-blowers from City Hall had arrived, and they insisted upon demolishing the stone building on the corner of Summer Street where the Waltham Watch people are. Woolley maintained that it was a strong building,

and would prove a buffer to the fire raging in Lovejoy's store. The crowd was shouting to blow it up, and the powder men were evidently the sort who believe in heeding the voice of the people. At all events blow they would, the streams playing about there were all withdrawn, and every one ran for safety. I took position opposite Jordan and Marsh's building, and soon the explosion came, merely shattering the windows and filling the street with nasty smoke. Then there was another wrangle, followed by re-mining the building, and some one lighted the fuse. We took to our heels again and waited, but no explosion came and I suppose the fuse went out. An old fireman standing near me remarked that if this sort of thing was going to be allowed the fire would be in the North End by sunrise, and intimated that it was getting about time to hang somebody. Then I saw Woolley trying to get the firemen back to work. The buildings on the westerly side of Washington Street were getting very hot, and some of the roofs were smoking. Then a group of hosemen made a rush and put a stream up on to the Winter Street cor-

ner; others followed, and soon there was a powerful battery of streams at work again. The blowers went off, followed by all sorts of lurid imprecations from the firemen. The figuring of time for last night is out of the question, but I believe a good half-hour was lost by this well-nigh criminal foolishness. I said to Woolley then, that as between water, and powder as it was being used by our zealous citizens, the former was our best reliance. And now, old man, I have written my hand into a paralysis. It is striking ten and I must stop. I will mail this in two envelopes and only hope that you will receive them together, or at all events that the last half won't reach you first. I will finish up my story as soon as I can, perhaps to-morrow. Your brother Frank looked in here a minute ago in full regimentals, being on duty with the Cadets. I told him I was writing you, and he said to tell you that he was very well and busy. I hear taps on the Common, and so good-night.

Always yours.

Mt. Vernon Street, November 11, 1872.

DEAR HARRY, —

General Burt has done wonders with the Post Office, which is now in Faneuil Hall, and we had our regular delivery this morning. I have yours dated Rouen, and gave your message to Kidder, Peabody and Co. this afternoon. There is nothing to be done on the Hartford and Erie's at present. Yes, work has been started on your house. I saw them driving the piles last week. A charming location you have, and your children's children (if the race survives the wind and dust) may find amusement in watching the city grow out to where they live. To think of your abandoning your green acres and your great trees for this! But you are married, and vanity and love of fashion were ever the curse of womankind.

We have had another night of fire and added another million or more to our losses. A gas explosion at midnight wrecked Shreve, Crump and Low's building on the corner of Summer and

Washington Streets, and the shell burst into flames. Hovey's was saved again, and their building, with the store of R. H. Stearns and Co. adjoining, is all that now remains intact on the southerly side of Summer Street. It was fortunate that we had so many out-of-town fire companies here, for the city firemen were beaten out to a point of absolute exhaustion. All of these people arrived Sunday, some of them not till late, so they were in reasonably good condition to meet this last ordeal. I went to bed last night about four o'clock, for the second time, and was up at half-past seven this morning, breakfasted at the Club, and then went down into the burned district to see what small part I could play in bringing order out of chaos. But before saying more about last night's fire, or about this strange and confused day, I am going to complete my narrative of nocturnal wanderings during the raging of the conflagration.

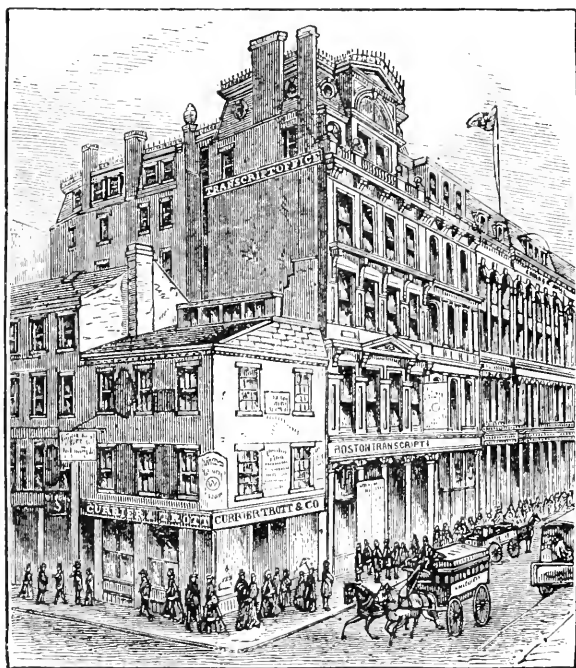
When I left Alderman Woolley on Sunday morning, I passed along Washington Street and saw the really good and successful fight that was made



LOOKING UP SUMMER STREET, SHOWING HOVEY'S AND RUINS OF SHREVE,
CRUMP & LOW'S

there to protect the buildings on the westerly side. I don't know whether it was because Hovey's example was contagious, but wet blankets were much in evidence on the roofs all along between Milk and Winter streets. The water-supply seemed good, and the streams not only washed the roofs on the westerly side, but they played into the burning buildings opposite with enough effect to take some of the wickedness out of the fire. It was a long, hard fight for the Marlboro' Hotel, and the big marble building of Macullar, Williams and Parker threw out a heat that made the contest doubtful for hours. As I walked down Washington Street, I came upon the marines from the Navy Yard marching silently, their gun-barrels flashing red as they came into the light of the fire at the head of Milk Street. Looking down Milk, I saw that the flames had control on the Devonshire Street corner, and it looked too as though the fire had got into Morton Place in the rear of the Transcript building and the high blocks adjoining. I heard the Old South clock strike, I don't know what hour, and I know the thought came to my

mind that perhaps it would never strike again. There was great confusion about the church, and one of the out-of-town engineers told me that they were mining that little building of Currier and

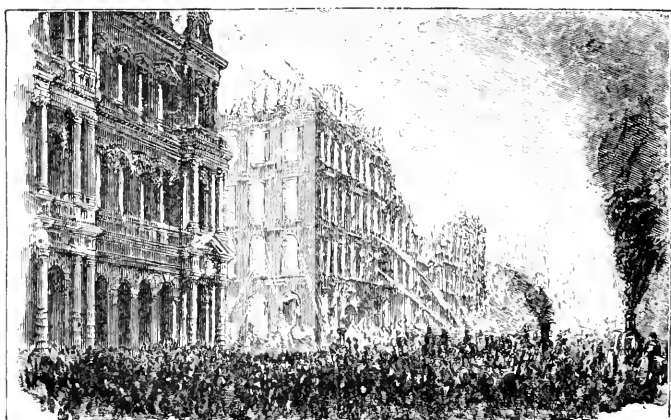


TRANSCRIPT BUILDING, WITH CURRIER & TROTT'S STORE

Trott that is wedged in between the Transcript and the Milk Street corner. What possible good could come from that was not clear to me nor to the engineer, but they were getting the hose away

and preparing for a smash. Wagons were backed up to the Transcript, for removing stock, I suppose, but the drivers whipped up and got out of the way, too. I went down through Spring Lane into Devonshire Street, and was not there long before I made up my mind that the granite walls of the unfinished post office building were worth a dozen steamers. Devonshire Street beyond Milk was all ablaze (I understand they blew it all to bits before the fire came in), and the short block on Milk between Devonshire Street and Congress was also afire. But the conflagration was turned by the post office building, and being held on the northwesterly corner of Devonshire, it went down through Congress toward State Street on a narrow front. You will readily see from your familiarity with the locality how this was and how great the advantage gained. The staging around the post office took fire again and again, but through it all there were crowds of spectators inside the stone shell of the building who were not worrying a bit about their safety. So much for a really fire-proof building.

But with all the advantage achieved by this structure, when I stood at the corner of Water and Congress, things did not look well, first, because there were too few engines in the vicinity, and second, because there were too many of the powder-blowing brigade in evidence. When I saw the

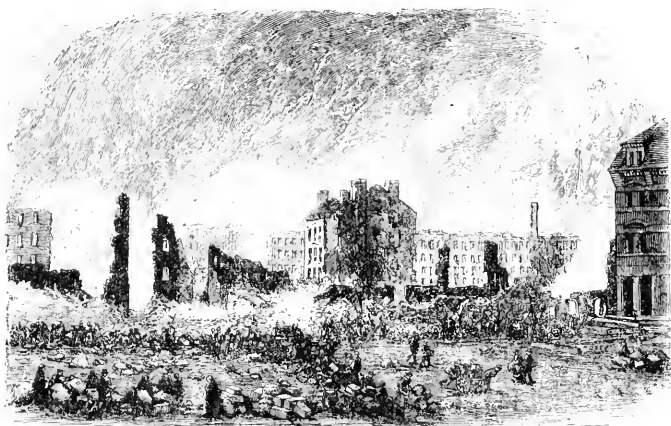


THE FIRE IN DEVONSHIRE STREET, LOOKING SOUTH

sailors from the Navy Yard desert their steamer and run away at the report that the fuse was lighted in a building a few doors from where they stood, I made up my mind that matters were getting serious. I stumbled on one of the Boston engineers, and asked if he did n't realize that all that sort of thing was simply paving a way for

the fire into State Street. He remarked that if he had his way all those helpful citizens with their d—d bags and kegs would find themselves in a hotter place than any he had seen that night. I think that this suggestion was my sole contribution to the fire-fighting generalship, and beyond drawing out the honest sentiment of an over-worked man I don't believe it had any effect. From here I wandered by Broad Street into open land about Fort Hill; and though the fire had not reached there, it was coming down without opposition to where it would have to stop for lack of fuel. Furniture and household goods were tumbled around in the open area, but there were comparatively few people here, and they sauntered about in little groups, seemingly as calm as though they had walked out to witness a display of the Northern Lights. I sat down in somebody's rocking-chair and gained a most comprehensive idea of the extent of the calamity, on the south and west there being an unbroken bow of flame and glowing smoke. I came up through State Street, and people were getting anxious there. Wagons were

carting away the mail and valuables from the post office and treasury in the Merchants' Exchange. Two or three engines were at work in the side streets, and from the corner of Kilby I could see the sparks from the fire in Milk Street falling like rain in Liberty Square. There was



VIEW OF THE FIRE FROM FORT HILL

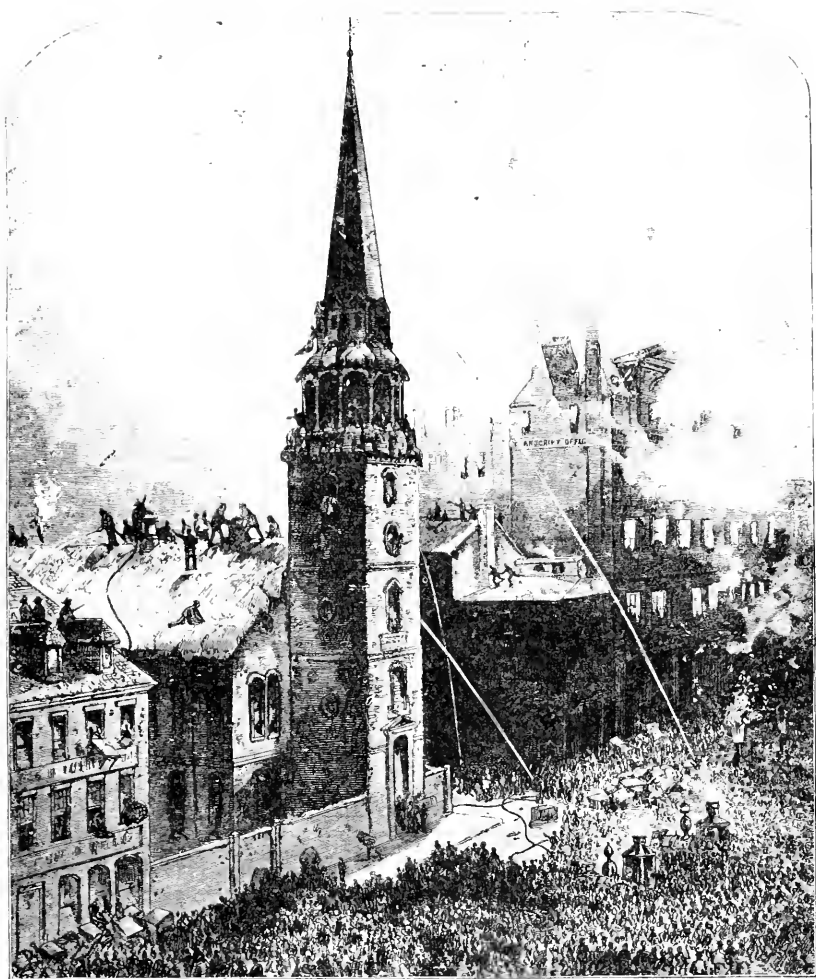
quite a crowd about the Union Safe Deposit Vaults, — people who wanted to get their valuables out, I suppose, — but all admission was denied. The gas was going in the office of Lee, Higginson and Company and in some of the banks, and it was a good, stiff question to decide whether

it was safer to leave securities in safes or vaults, or to cart them around through crowded, disordered streets and tuck them away in cellars and between mattresses on Beacon Hill. I never appreciated before the real blessings of poverty. I decided for myself and for those I was interested in, that it was best to trust the firemen and the vaults of the Union Safe Deposit. What they could n't do I was pretty sure I could n't.

It was not until I passed up by School Street on Washington that I realized daylight had come. The Transcript building was all burned out, but the walls were standing and the flames still flickered in the windows. Where I had left the powder-blowers, a single steamer was sending up a black smoke column that was silhouetted against the glow beyond. They were driving her hard, and as she quivered and roared she seemed pitted alone against a world aflame. The Old South had evidently been through a drenching, and as I stepped across to ask the engineman where he hailed from, I read, "Kearsarge, Portsmouth, N. H.," on the boiler-plate. Do you know it gave

me the sort of a thrill that I have n't felt since the first year of the war. At that minute Portsmouth seemed more remote to me than Timbuctoo, and if the engine had come from the moon it would hardly have produced a stronger impression. A tall fellow standing near me, who claimed to have been "raised down Portsmouth way," said that the steamer had come from New Hampshire an hour before in the very nick of time. Two or three streams were playing from the street, when a brand from the Transcript building blew across and lodged in the belfry. The slats were soon smoking, the streams fell short, and there were no ladders at hand. As the Kearsarge came up Washington Street her fires were lit, steam was up, and the men reeled off their hose with a will. There was great excitement in the crowd when the first water came at the nozzle, and as the stream soared higher and higher men fairly stood on tiptoe. Then the water broke in through the slats and out went the fire. I wish I had seen it.

You can imagine that by this time I was dead tired. My eyes smarted, my face burned, and I



"THE OLD SOUTH STANDS"

Frank Leslie's Conception of the Saving of the Church

NSCRIPT

R 11, 1872.

DAY

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THE TRANSCRIPT BUILDING,

one of the most northerly structures de-
stroyed by the great conflagration, took fire
in the rear part of the upper story at about
six o'clock on Sunday morning. At eleven
o'clock on Saturday night it was deemed pru-
dent to remove the books and papers from the
counting room to a place of safety. By the
kindness of J. E. Maynard & Co. of the
Revere Stables they were taken in car-
riages to the residence of Mr. Dutton, the
senior proprietor, No. 66½ Washington street.
The complete files since 1830 were thus saved.

The standing matter in the composing room
was put into the turtles and lowered into the
basement. The cases of type were disposed of
in a similar manner. The men connected with
the establishment worked with rare energy
and devotion. The most valuable portion of
the editorial library was saved.

From midnight until dawn those connected
with the different departments of the paper,
watched the approach of the flames with in-
tense solicitude. At times during the anxious
hours it was hoped the building might escape.

At five o'clock in the morning all hope dis-
appeared, as the buildings in immediate prox-
imity on the south and east sides were envel-
oped in fire. The flames made rapid head-
way when they began and in three hours this
elegant and costly structure was destroyed
all but its exterior walls.

Investigation this morning shows that the
printing machinery is damaged fully fifty per-
cent. The heavy timbers from the upper
story fell through the brick and iron arches
over the presses, and the large safe in the
counting room fell upon the Hoe four-cylinder
press. The double six cylinder is injured to
the extent of \$15,000 to \$18,000. The steam
engine is nearly ruined, the woodwork upon
and near it being destroyed. Experts esti-
mate that perhaps ten of the seventeen full
turtles may be saved. The type in cases is
ruined. The folding machine is also totally
destroyed.

As one instance of the alacrity with which
assistance came even from great distances,
we would here mention the appearance, at
seven o'clock Sunday morning, of Steamer
Kearsarge from Portsmouth, N. H., fully
manned, accompanied by the mayor of that
city. It was stationed at once near the Tran-
script Building, where for several hours it was
worked with unwearied efficiency.

Already there has been some compensation
for the serious disaster and loss to the Tran-
script in the cordial expressions of sympathy
and generous offers of aid so promptly ex-
tended to it. To the proprietors of other
journals and its numerous patrons and friends
the Transcript desires to return its sincere
thanks for their manifestations of good will,
in this hour of its misfortune. These will
never be forgotten.

Every effort will be made to restore the pa-
per at the earliest moment to its former pros-
perous condition, and make its publication
in all respects what it was before the inter-
ruption of its business.

BRIEF

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cheerfully.

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the great calamity,
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was wet through below the knees. I determined to go up to Mt. Vernon Street, have a bath, get a bite at the Club, and then come down to the fire again. But Alderman Power came along with some men that I knew in the Council, and wanted my help in making some arrangements by which the firemen could be properly fed. This struck me as very good work, so along I went. The poor fellows were very much in evidence in Tremont Street, and I saw some in State Street dragging their weary way along, drenched to the skin and as black as salamanders, in search of breakfast. We beat up a few restaurants, and finally fixed matters up very well with the United States Hotel. I went up to the Hollis Street church, where they had opened the chapel and were soliciting contributions of food and coffee for the firemen. After the stifling atmosphere of the burning streets, it was good to stand again in the warm sunlight and to breathe the good air that drew across the Common. I had no idea what time it was until I heard the Sunday morning bells of the Back Bay and South End. There was an engine work-

ing in Tremont Street, and the engineer was sitting on a box and drinking coffee from a tin can as an evidence that my recent labors had not been wasted. The drums were beating and the militiamen in their long coats were coming on duty. A troop of cavalry clattered along Boylston Street, so you see the soldiers can find horses if the firemen can't. The Common was a sight, with huge masses of merchandise heaped about in confusion, under guard of the owners and their clerks. The great crowds that had poured in from the suburbs gave things a holiday appearance. Thousands stood watching the smoke that rose from the burned district, and jostled about the telescope for a nearer glimpse of the great tumbled masses that looked like huge thundercaps all stained with gray and brown. Winter and Bromfield Streets were packed with people who peered down their narrow vistas into the smoky waste. I marked all this as I was dragging myself across the Common to the Club, and on Park Street I ran plump into Frank in a state of dumb astonishment. He had passed a quiet night, had started out to attend service at

Trinity, and I found him trying to adjust his mind to the change that had come over the world. I assure you that there were hundreds of good sleepers with clear consciences in the same predicament. I had no sooner stepped inside the Club than they handed me a note, which I found to be from Maria, saying that she was at my rooms on the hill and must see me at once. I found it had been left an hour before, but the cravings of my inner man seemed stronger than the claims of consanguinity, and no chair ever felt as good to me as the one into which I dropped in the dining-room. There were a dozen fellows breakfasting there—some who were burned out and some who expected to be. Do you remember that red-headed chap who made such a row at Point Shirley last summer, the day you had your dinner at Taft's? Well, I found him groaning about having a worse time than anybody. He reported that a big gang of roughs had got off at the "Know-Nothing" on the arrival of the night express from New York. No one had any hope for State Street, and one man assured us that the Chief Engineer had

gone crazy and been taken to an insane asylum. All this was pleasant to hear. Shorty was the only cheerful man I met. His store has gone, of course, and he does n't know how he stands on insurance, but he said every one was in the same box, and at any rate the coffee and fish-balls were good. He lost a good cigar among his other trials, some one knocking it out of his mouth as he was helping to unload powder in Devonshire Street. He is with me on the explosive question, and says it would have been better for the town if powder had never been thought of. He says you can't make a mining engineer out of a haberdasher or a barber by handing him a piece of paper.

I finished breakfast, and leaving Shorty asleep in a chair, with his six feet four spread out all over the room, started for the hill. I found Maria waiting patiently, and she was in a really alarmed and tearful state. I thought she was simply mourning for the city, but my guess was wild. She had seen in the Herald that the militia was to be called out, and she was dreading that Freddie, with that throat of his, would have to buckle on his armor

THE FIRE FIEND!

Terrible Conflagration in Boston!

FEARFUL BLOW TO THE BUSINESS INTERESTS OF THE CITY!

The Most Costly and Valuable Warehouses and Mercantile Establishments Laid in Ashes!

THE LOSS ESTIMATED BY MILLIONS!

The Calamity Attended by Loss of Life!

THE STARTING POINT ON SUMMER STREET.

Uncontrollable Progress of the Flames!

THE FIREMEN POWERLESS TO SAVE.

A Tornado Created by the Intense Heat.

FLAMES AND SPARKS BLOWN IN ALL DIRECTIONS.

Buildings Lapped Up by the Flames and Reduced to Ashes in a Moment.

SCENES IN THE STREETS.

plied by Leland & Wheeler, gent's furnishing goods and Sawyer, Mansfield & Co., importers of dry goods.

The next are Eager, Bartlett & Co., woollen goods; O. B. North & Son, hats, caps and furs; next, Farley, Amsden & Co., dry goods jobbers; Rhodes & Ripley, wholesale clothing. The latter firm owned the building. The building up to the point of starting was granite four stories and a half, occupied largely by Malvin, Mullen & Lewis, dealers in trumplings, who used the entire lower floor. Harding Bros. & Co. and G. L. Ide, Carter & Co., occupied the upper floors. From this building across the square, diagonally, was a stone block occupied by Smith, Koch & Corson and George M. Glazier, dealers in coats, skirts and knitted goods. The buildings thus far named were, before 9 o'clock, placed beyond any possible chance of attack, and the firemen felt them to burn while they endeavored to check the progress of the mad, devouring element which was making a frightful rapid route in all directions. On the corner of City and Summer streets stood the Everett block, an imposing granite structure, owned by the Everett estate. It included Nos. 52, 51, 50, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57 and 58 Summer street, and occupied by B. D. Lyons & Co., West Bros. & Dreyfus, Phillips & Shuman, C. E. King & Co., and Marr Bros., dealers in clothing, furnishing goods, heavy goods, trumplings, &c. The upper floors were used mostly as offices and occupied by various parties. It was about 9 o'clock when the flames caught on the top of this building and upon it the efforts of the engines located in that vicinity were bent. The efforts were unavailing, however, as hardly a drop of water could be got to the top of the building. A line of hose was soon run up on the inside and the firemen remained as long as they possibly could, striving to check the flames. One fireman was seen clinging on to a beam at the very top of the building, directing a stream of fire which was above him and on one side flashing almost in his face. His perilous position excited some alarm, but he took till the last chance and then retired in safety. Now the fire began to creep steadily up both sides of Summer street, crawling along from roof to roof as though the walls were a rivalry between the flames as to which should outstrip the other speed. Opposite the Everett block, the buildings as they were engaged in the succession, were as follows: Brick store front, occupied by A. Fossum & Sons, dry goods and oil cloths; George H. Butler, hosiery; Granite block; Morse, Hamer & Co., hosiery and gloves; styles, Ben Homer, wholesale clothing; S. Klous & hats, caps and furs; Stocker Bros., hat cap manufacturers; Wyman & Ark imported goods and linens; Ew Wase & Fuller, linens and hosiery; Rothwell, Luther, Potter & clothing; Mitchell, Green & Stevens, clothing. While the fire on the northern side of Summer street was marching along on the Everett block, which had not a time become largely covered, the suddenly burst out in a new and unexpected quarter, leaping across and lighting the top of a building on Arch street, & doors removed from Summer street. Before the existence of the flame quarter was known they had spread through the building and were a perfect torrent from all the windows front of the fancy goods store of Loom & Martin. Several of the quickly sent together, but with them a single bucket full of water was used. The fire spread enveloping the stores of Thomas M. Hildison, Charles M. Percival & Co., Miner of which were quite the whole of the street of flame column of

owners, mined, not, but adjoining moved.

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and plunge into danger with the Ancients. As a lawyer who knew his frail physical condition, she thought I could do something towards getting him excused from martial exercises. Do you know that girl troubles me? She used to have a clear understanding and a sense of humor, but this was the errand that brought her down-town before breakfast! I told her that there was no occasion for me to employ the adroitness of my legal mind, that the policy of the authorities was always to hold the Ancients in reserve for great emergencies, and that they would surely not be let loose in the streets until the police had been overpowered, the militia routed, and the marines and regulars all slain at their posts. Moreover, I told her that I regarded the present situation as quite peaceful on the whole. I waited for her to laugh, to smile, and, by Jove! she did n't, — she was only relieved and grateful. I believe she honestly thinks that Freddie joined the Ancients because of his yearning to bleed for his country. I told her some of the things I have described to you, and enlarged upon the Kearsarge episode. She thought it was fine and

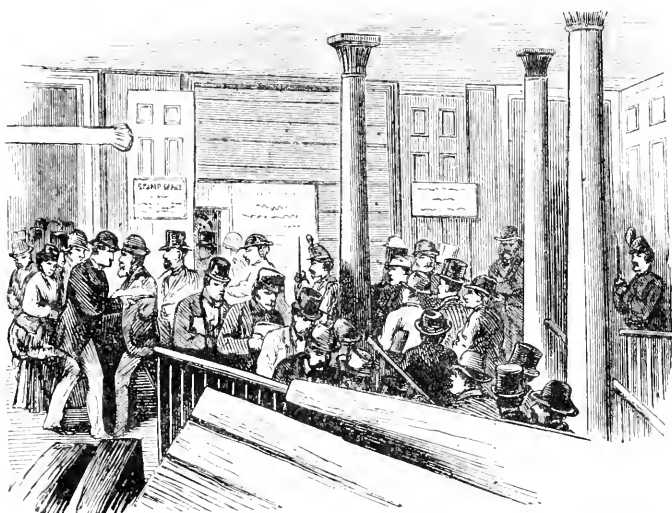
splendid to think of that company coming so far and doing so much. She thought it was inspiring to think of all these brave fellows coming in from great distances to save the city, and wished she were a man and could do her part in the good fight. Her color came back, her eyes flashed, and yet if I had told her that Freddie was needed on guard she would have fainted on the floor. Well, I told her no such thing, and she insisted on my taking her where she could see all that was going on. I was getting restless myself, so we went out to Beacon Street and over the hill. It was one o'clock, and in front of the State House we met one of the young men from Kidder, Peabody and Co.'s office. He said that the fire was burning in the Merchants' Exchange Building, and that, while all the mail had been removed to Faneuil Hall, they had word from Chief Damrell (who had not gone crazy after all) that the danger for State Street had passed. He said that Lee, Higginson and Co. had a squad of regulars from the forts in their office, that the men in the vaults were all armed, and that there had been a good deal of

excitement among the people who were denied admission to their boxes. We hurried down into Tremont Street and down Court Street, and finally through the crowd to a point almost opposite the Merchants' Bank. There was a great crowd here, and State Street was full of puffing engines, and it was almost as dark as night under the great pall of smoke they made. There were glimmers of red fire in Congress Street, but for the most part it was all smoke and noise, with occasional glimpses of the firemen swarming up and down the steps of the Merchants' Exchange. We came upon your neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Morse, and they said they had just spoken with the Mayor and he said the danger was over. The fire had been burning in the post office all the morning, and the firemen had their hose inside and were driving it back. I never saw such a massing of fire engines as there was here, and when I told Maria that they represented a dozen cities and towns, she said it was splendid, that it was like 1775 when the New England minute men thronged to Boston in her need. We decided to go to the Parker House



MERCHANTS' EXCHANGE BUILDING, STATE STREET, WHERE FIRE WAS STOPPED

for a bite of lunch, and turning from Washington into School, found the Kearsarge steamer still humming away in front of the Old South, a sight that delighted Maria's heart. Arrived at the hotel, we found it crowded and found also that their



POST OFFICE IN FANEUIL HALL

kitchen had gone absolutely out of business. Everything eatable had been devoured by hordes of famished strangers. So we went up to the Tremont House for a car, and hitched and crawled along to Boylston Street, where we found ourselves blocked by a crowd that was making

quite a noisy demonstration. I was hanging to a strap and could n't see anything; but when the conductor came through he said that the cheering was for some more Providence engines that had just come in and passed down Boylston Street. Maria was for getting off again, and it took some quiet firmness on my part to calm her enthusiasm. At the house Maria and I picked away at the cold turkey, while Freddie, arrayed in his long dressing-gown and smoking his pipe, condescended to come in and sit with us. He had the hiccoughs, but they did n't prevent him from dispensing words of wisdom and explaining how easily the fire might have been stopped if they had only gone at it in the right way. What an ass he is! It was after four o'clock when I got to Mt. Vernon Street again. You know how I spent the evening in writing you. After I mailed your letter I again headed for the hill, and had been in bed but half an hour when I heard the bell of the Charles Street church ringing alarm after alarm from the box at the corner of Winter Street and Central Place. So I tumbled into my clothes, more asleep than



THE OLD SOUTH, Nov. 10, 1872, SHOWING FIRE ENGINE AT CORNER HELD BY THE KEARSARGE OF PORTSMOUTH, N. H.

awake, stumbled across the Common, and for one good hour was as anxious as I had been at any time Saturday night.

I have told you how fortunate it was that the Mayor requested the firemen who had come from a distance to stay over until Monday. The burden of this fight fell upon the companies from Providence, Fall River, Manchester, New Hampshire, New Haven and Norwich, Connecticut. Chief Damrell had command, and, jaded as he must have been, he handled it splendidly. It looked for a long time as though Jordan, Marsh and Co.'s must go, and only good work saved it. There was an engine from Norwich located right on the Winter Street corner, and she played the best stream I have seen since I got into Summer Street Saturday night. They kept it pouring into the high Luthern windows on the corner for hours, without once shutting down, and that was a big factor in keeping the flames from crossing Washington Street. The company only arrived about half an hour before the fire broke out, and they left for home this morning early,

after paying their bills at the United States Hotel.

As I said, I got to bed at four o'clock and was down on State Street at ten. I went to Brewster, Sweet and Co.'s, where I found that our Stock Exchange had opened, but had adjourned at once because of the threatening array of sellers. As you may imagine, the New York opening was a wild one. Prices tumbled all around at first, but recovered considerably before the close at four o'clock. The principal stocks showed a loss of from 2 to 3 points over the Saturday night closing. Pacific Mail declined from 90 $\frac{5}{8}$ to 84. Every one is anxious, of course, to know what the Government will do if the financial stringency becomes more acute. I saw a telegram from Washington to-day, stating that Secretary Boutwell is alive to the situation and is ready at a moment's notice to counteract a decline in bonds or a rise in gold by a purchase of the former or by selling large amounts of the latter. It looks black for our local insurance companies, but the foreign companies have, of course, no interest here comparable to what they had in Chicago.



LOOKING DOWN SUMMER STREET, SHOWING RUINS OF SHREVE, CRUMP & LOW'S —
HOVEY'S IN DISTANCE

To conclude, the Union Club house was scorched this afternoon. The fire caught in the wooden elevator over the range in the kitchen, about four o'clock, followed up the elevator to the third floor, and was stopped there. But smoke and water have made the house uninhabitable, and so on to the sidewalk we go. By Jove, I wonder if I shall ever get the smell of smoke out of my nostrils or the throb of the steam-engines out of my ears. When I close my eyes I see miles of red flame, and in my dreams I hear walls falling, the wind shrieking, and that infernal never-ceasing hum of the engines. I must go up and see Maria's children and let them pound it all out of my system on that overworked piano.

I have a lot more to tell you, but not to-night. A package of papers goes forward to-day, and you can figure out just who of your friends has suffered. Tell Eleanor for all our sakes not to despair of Maria, but to insist on her coming out in the spring. You can write over that Eleanor has the small-pox or something rather disturbing of that sort, and we'll manage to get Maria off.

1 8 7 2

You know the life she leads, and how much she needs a change. If she will only leave him, we can take hold here and perhaps make a man of Freddie yet.

Always yours.

Mt. Vernon St., November 15, 1872.

DEAR HARRY, —

I received your cable on Wednesday and replied to it the same day. There is no possible use in your coming home, and, indeed, you are one of the few men I know whose interests are not seriously affected by this fire. Your presence here will not help the securities market, your property is unharmed, and you would only make one more in the worrying crowd that is trying to straighten out the confusion and making more in the process.

The principal streets north and south are of course blocked by the wreckage of the fire, and the result is that Tremont Street is jammed with traffic from walk to walk. It forms to-day the only practicable line of communication between the North and South ends, although the route *via* Cambridge and Charles Streets is now helping us out somewhat. We hope to have Washington Street reopened by to-morrow night, but there is

still much to be done there in cleaning up and taking down dangerous walls.

We have word this morning that the Malta has put into Halifax with a broken shaft, so my struggles to get off my letters by her were all labor wasted. I suppose this will go out by the Olympus to-morrow, and if it is the first word you have of the fire from me, I would have you know that there are solid ounces of descriptive matter from my pen which started earlier and will arrive later.

The fire which destroyed the Summer Street corner shortly after midnight on Sunday was the result of a gas-explosion. It seems that the gas leaking all over the burned district had become confined under fallen masonry and in some way found its way into the sewers. When Shreve, Crump and Low's blew up, the iron covers of the man-holes all about that district went sailing through the air like so many autumn leaves. It is a wonder that many were not killed in the early stages of that fire, and I hear that at first the country firemen did n't like their job a bit. But they buckled down to their work later, and held the fire,



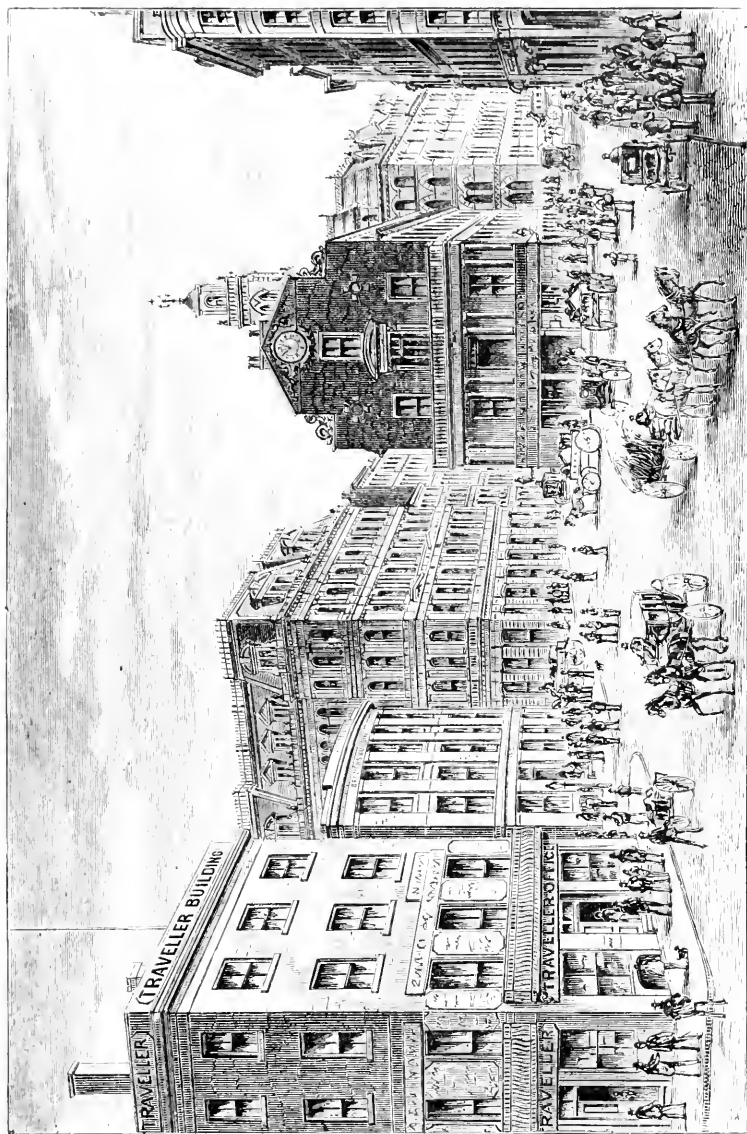
LOOKING DOWN WASHINGTON STREET, FROM WINTER, NOV. 11, 1872

as I stated in my last. The gas people shut off the supply at once, and do you know that Monday and Tuesday nights our streets and houses were absolutely without light? I had tickets for *Article 47* at the Museum for Monday night, but they had to close their doors, with all the other theatres in town. There was a great rush for lamps, oil, and candles, and people in those lines of business made a good thing out of the public misfortune. I bought a couple of brass lamps and a lot of candles for mother's house, but found afterwards that my precautions were unnecessary, as Roxbury had light. I had to go down to the Parker House Tuesday evening, and it was a queer sight to see the dining-room lit by candles on the tables, and every one spoiling their eyes in trying to read the evening papers. The night was rainy with a high wind, the moon of course hidden, and, with the streets as dark as a pocket and with rumors flying about of new importations of roughs, you can imagine that we did not feel very secure. I understand that my good neighbors in the West End organized themselves into armed committees

and patrolled the streets ; but as I spent Monday and Tuesday nights at mother's, I know nothing of it except by hearsay. I got out father's old revolver which I think had been loaded ever since 1863, and if I had been called upon to fire it, I suppose it would have destroyed the house and every one in it. The police have done well, but the soldiers were, of course, our principal reliance. The Cadets went off duty Monday night, when the Fifth Regiment was called out. Some of the First Regiment, quartered in the Old South, struck the bell the other night and created a panic all about there by giving the impression that there was another fire. They have n't found the culprits, but it was a dirty thing to do when every one is so nervous that they jump a mile at the sound of a fire-alarm. I looked into the Old South one evening, and saw the soldiers curled up asleep in the pews and all over the floor. It was rainy and cold, the windows were all broken in, and it was a picture of discomfort. The papers point out that this is the first military occupation of the church since the British used it as a riding-school way back in Revolutionary days.

There were complaints of drunkenness among the out-of-town firemen on Saturday and Sunday. The truth seems to be that the country firemen brought in a lot of hangers-on from their towns, some of whom donned firemen's uniforms without hankering for hard work, and it was among these idlers that the trouble occurred. The rum-shops have been closed this week, so the poor man goes dry. Shorty says that he was accosted yesterday in front of the St. Joachim Bazar by a chap who probably had n't been sober for years, and who said, "What 's the use of having such a h—l of a fire in Boston if a feller can't get a drink?" I thought the gentleman's point of view very interesting. Some of the clergymen tell us that the fire was sent as a warning to us to mend our ways, but here is a man who holds other views and who asserts that the fire has utterly failed of its object.

The fire at the Club was not so bad as I thought, and, now that we have gas again, you can be very comfortable there if you don't object to the combined odor of smoke and fresh paint. There was great excitement in the house while the fire lasted.



VIEW AT THE HEAD OF STATE STREET

The soldiers came with a rush, and Park Street was jammed with engines all drawn by hand, except one from Manchester, N. H., which was propelled by its own steam. I never heard of such a machine, but if one has been built I prophesy that in five years all of our engines will run that way. If they can only apply the same principle to street cars, drays, and wagons, horse epidemics will lose their terrors for the future.

They had a grand row on Kilby Street Sunday morning over the use of powder. I hear two or three versions of the story, but it appears to have come down to a direct conflict between the firemen and the powder brigade. It seems that General Benham, who is in command of the harbor forts, volunteered his services at City Hall, and left there early Sunday morning with the idea that he was in charge of the powder operations. In the mean time the Fire Chief, alarmed by the reports of his officers, had rescinded his permits and ordered his men to have the explosions stopped, to arrest and if necessary to kill any one attempting to use powder. The rumor got into State Street

about daylight that the Chief had turned against powder and that Benham had threatened to blow up the buildings on the southerly side between Kilby and Congress, "Damrell or no Damrell." At all events Alderman Woolley interfered with some men who were carrying powder into a building on Kilby Street, and, the police supporting him, he had it all brought out. Then Benham came along and ordered them to take it in again. Woolley objected, and Benham came up and asked if he knew who he was. Woolley said he did n't. Then says the other, "I am General Benham." Woolley announced that he did n't care if he was "General Damnation," the powder should n't go in. I understand that Benham then showed some authority from the Mayor or the Chief, and that the powder did go in. I also understand that it came out again by order of the Chief or one of his assistants, and that was the last of powder for this fire. While the rumpus was going on, the firemen were mixing in it, and of course doing everything except throwing water. It is only fair to say that the general denies that he ever said

he would blow up State Street or in any way oppose the Chief. They also deny from the Mayor's office that they gave Benham any authority, merely recommending that he place his professional experience at the disposal of the Chief Engineer. So I give you the story as I get it, and you can make up your own mind as to facts.

Shorty tells me that he saw your former comrade in arms, Henry Higginson, driving a wagon-load of powder along State Street on Sunday morning, right among the engines that were throwing sparks in all directions. It seems that he had been ordered by General Benham to go down to Central Wharf, get the powder, which the government tug-boat had brought up from the forts, and deliver it at the corner of State and Kilby. When Shorty suggested that he was on dangerous business, Higginson replied that it seemed to him a wicked thing to do, but orders were orders and that was all there was to it. I suppose that's what army training does for a man. Shorty says even army training would n't do it for him, and when they commenced to unload the powder right there in the street he got around

the corner with all the agility of the young man on the flying trapeze.

There was a great time at the Union Safe Deposit Vaults ; they had regulars on guard, as I think I wrote you, and armed employés on duty day and night. I had a talk yesterday with young Lyman in Lee, Higginson and Co.'s office, and he gave a very laughable account of their troubles, and mimicked a lot of our solid people who came down there in a panic on Sunday to remove their valuables. He gave, too, a funny description of the employés who had abandoned their pens for firearms. Of course, things at the Vaults were terribly serious, but it is pleasant to find any one who can be jocose in discussing our calamity.

Last night I took Maria to Mr. Froude's lecture in Tremont Temple. There was a beggarly audience, and I thought Mr. F. was not pleased. He said that he should have preferred to cancel the engagement in view of existing conditions, but it had been represented to him that the public desired the course to go on without interruption. He talked about the English in Ireland, but I was n't

much interested. Maria took notes, and I suppose got something out of it.

No one knows just where they stand at present. The safes are being recovered from the ruins with



TREMONT TEMPLE IN 1872

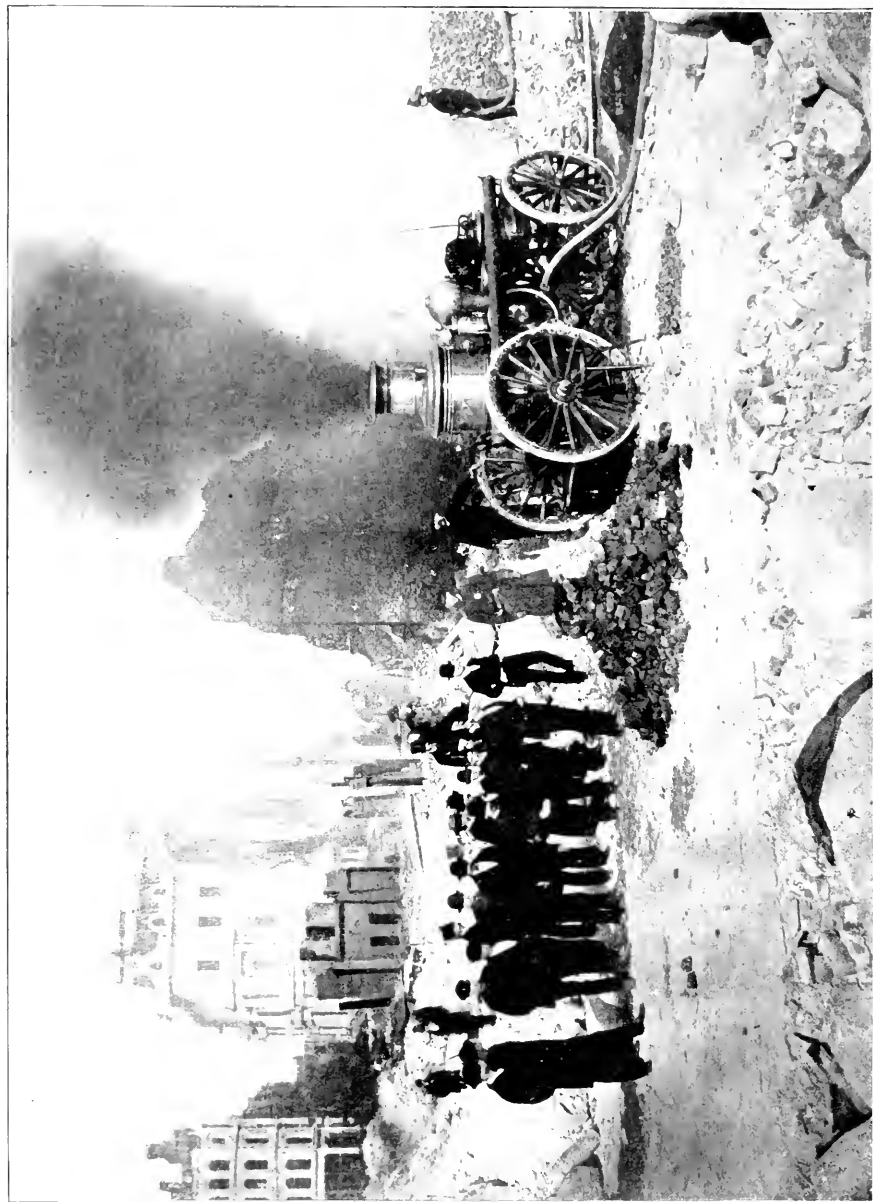
all kinds of results. It would seem that all our local insurance companies, with the possible exception of one or two, are gone, and it is problematical as to just what they will pay. Shorty finds he is covered by policies in English companies, so he

comes out well, as he deserves to. He got his safe out yesterday, and found the contents all right. The firemen of the Mount Vernon Street engine were good to him, and played a stream into his cellar to cool things off. I have an idea that they may get cigars or a piano out of it, for there is nothing mean about Shorty. Did I write you of how he worked on the brakes of a Wakefield hand-engine Saturday night? As he was wandering about lending a hand here and there, he fell in with the Wakefield tub down on Broad Street. He made up his mind to work off his despair by hard labor, and he says they "shook it out of her" in great shape and that he has n't had such a time in years. He says Wakefield had no call for help from Boston, but seeing the light of the fire they started off to find it. After running thirteen miles, they found it sure enough, and found Shorty, too, anxious to lend a hand on the brakes.

I had a call Tuesday from Bob Palmer, and he gave me an account of how Shorty met the first shock of disaster. Bob left Chicago ten days ago, and came over from New York to spend a

quiet Sunday with his old chum. He says they came downtown late in the evening, and when they got where they could look into Franklin Street the whole five stories of Shorty's building were in the cellar. Bobsays that Shorty made but two remarks in his presence, and lit a cigar between them. The first was, "Well, I'll be d—d!" The other, "Come, let her rip, it's too hot to stay here." The next moment he was helping load a wagon from a store farther up the street, and then went around to lend a hand at Palmer and Bachelder's, after sending Bob home to keep the family from worrying.

People have taken their losses in all kinds of ways. Billy H—— cried, and so did others for that matter. Poor Sawney got drunk, but that might have happened had there been no fire. Ned carried on like a madman when he found after the play that Otis Street had gone, and they took him home in a hack before midnight. Most of our friends have shown real pluck. Bob, by the way, has become a thorough Westerner, and maintains that we have n't had much of a fire and that



CATARACT STEAMER, NO. 10 ("THE MT. VERNON ST. ENGINE") AT WORK ON THE RUINS.
NEW POST OFFICE IN DISTANCE

altogether it was a pretty tame show as compared with Chicago's effort of a year ago.

By the way, Freddie honored me with a call this morning at my office. He dropped in to say that I had been gulling Maria with my Kearsarge story, and that he had it on indisputable authority that brands on the Old South steeple were few and far between, and that engines from Newton, Watertown, or somewhere near home, put them out. I do hear that every one is claiming the credit of having "saved" the church, but I shall stand by the story of my tall friend and the Kearsarge of Portsmouth. I know you will be glad to hear of my call and what caused it. It's so like Freddie.

I heard a good story to-day about Mr. Endicott of Hovey's firm. He was at his home in Beverly, and did n't hear of the fire until Sunday morning. He went over to Salem, and, finding no train, rode up with an expressman over the road. On reaching Boston he tried to pay his driver for his pains, but the man refused any compensation. Mr. E. insisting, the fellow said that he could n't

take anything from him, because Hovey's had been burned early the previous night, and he hadn't the heart to tell him before. In view of the circumstances, this story has both a humorous and humanitarian interest, and serves to show something of the spirit of the times.

The open lands on the Back Bay and down Fort Hill way are to be used for temporary business structures, and the city government is considering giving over the Common for the same purpose. But this will never do, and will raise a public howl. Moreover, I don't believe that it is at all necessary. The Coliseum is garrisoned by troops and used for the storage of goods. This enormous fire-trap has been a terrible bugbear of late, people fearing it might be set afire and start another conflagration. I heard to-night that it is to be sold at auction within a week, on the understanding that it shall be taken down at once. The financial situation continues strained, and the banks are very timid. The Freeman's, Everett, Shawmut, Mount Vernon, North America, and Revere, were burned out, but all but the Freeman's found the contents

of their safes in good order. There is a remarkable situation at the Freeman's. I have the story from Henry Rogers, whose father, as you know, is President of the Bank. When their safe fell, it was broken by striking on a stone pillar, and when opened all the money, notes and papers were found blackened and charred. There was a list of the depositors in the hands of the printer, and one cash book had been taken home by the Cashier to trace some trifling error. These comprised the sum total of the bank's books and records when it opened for business on Monday. The officers commenced operations by calling in the pass books and requesting their customers to bring in a record of their indebtedness to the bank. Do you know, they have had a crowd of people at the counter all this week signing new notes to take the place of those destroyed. Henry says it has been a most wonderful exhibition of mercantile honor and he does n't believe they had one skulker on their books. The majority of these people have lost heavily, but they don't propose that the bank shall lose if they can rake enough out of the ruins

to pay their notes. It is a hard time for thousands of employés of homeless concerns, but few dwellings were burned, so there is little distress from that cause. There are some ugly rumors about the origin of the fire, and there is a dispute as to whether it took in the roof or basement of the building first consumed. There will be an investigation, of course, and I have an idea that they will find that it caught in some way from the boiler-fire in the basement, which was located close to the elevator-shaft. Of course one hears criticism of everybody who took a hand in trying to stay the fire. Men who snored in their beds while the flames were raging now tell us of how easily the destruction might have been stopped. I have said some things myself about the powder men, and yet I must admit that they acted bravely and risked their lives for the public good. The Chief Engineer is the principal target for the critics, and they claim that he fought the fire piecemeal and not according to a good set plan. I imagine that the criticism is fair enough, but after the water gave out in Summer Street, as it did, and the fire went gal-

loping in all directions through wooden roofs piled way up out of reach, plans were at a discount, and the best scheme in the world would have miscarried because of lack of means to carry it out. The truth is, no one believed that such a thing could happen, and so no one was prepared to meet it. I confess that I don't see now how the fire ever got so utterly beyond control in the first building. Had it been a night like the one on which the Adelphi Theatre burned, I could have understood it, but weather conditions were all favorable and the air still and mild. There is a good deal of talk about the horse disease having demoralized the fire department, but I don't know what the truth is. I suppose the devil had a hand in things, and that is reason enough. A dozen firemen lost their lives, and most of these were from out of town. Both officers of the Roxbury Ladder Truck were killed in one of the Washington Street stores.

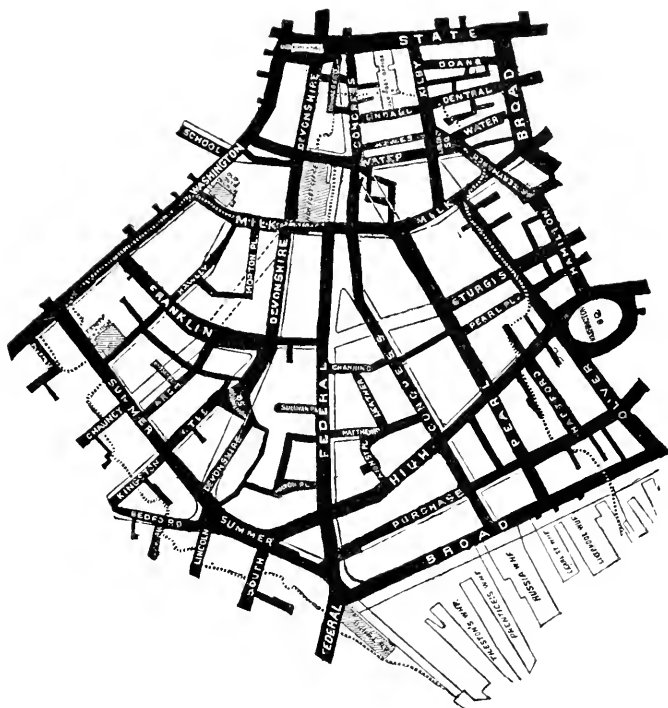
The question of changes in the old street lines is already being discussed. Some radicals argue for the obliteration of all the old lines and planting

a bit of Philadelphia's gridiron design in our midst.

There is no doubt that Washington and Summer streets will be widened, and I think that Hawley and Arch will also be broadened into real streets. There is a scheme for connecting Franklin and Sturgis streets, making a wide thoroughfare from Washington to Broad. We have a great chance to make things better, and I don't think we shall altogether miss it.

We have had tenders of financial aid from all over the United States, and I am sorry to say that some of these offers have been accepted. The generosity displayed throughout the country is really magnificent; but we are quite able to care for our own, and I see no reason why Philadelphia, Chicago, and other cities should be bled when there is no occasion for it. If the matter can be arranged decently, all outside funds accepted in a moment of panic should be politely and gratefully returned. I think it may come to this, as our home contributions are pouring in fast. Even Freddie has risen to the occasion. Shorty is down for a

The following is a diagram of the proposed revision of streets in the burnt district, prepared at the City Hall under the general direction of the committee on streets.



On this plan the black lines stand for the existing streets; the irregular dotted line, from near Liverpool Wharf to Congress Square and thence, through Washington and Summer, to Federal Street, marks the boundary of the fire. The light lines in the drawing indicate the proposed widenings and extensions. The principal changes are these: Federal Street is made a main avenue, eighty feet wide, to the foot of Summer Street, and so on to South Boston; widened on the right coming toward State Street, and swinging to the right from the foot of Franklin Street, so as to pass the new post office on the east side into Congress Street, which is widened on the left to State.

Summer Street is widened on the left, going from Washington in several places, and on the right between Lincoln and South streets.

Washington Street is widened to sixty feet on the right coming toward Cornhill.

Bedford Street is widened on the right going from Kingston to Church Green, and the Church Green lot is rounded off.

Franklin Street is extended across Devonshire, Federal, and Congress streets to Stur-

gis, and is widened on the south side between Devonshire and Federal.

Hawley Street is widened to forty feet, mainly on the right from Summer, and is cut through to Milk Street.

Chamney Street is widened and cut through to the junction of Devonshire and Milk streets; and Arch Street is discontinued.

Otis Street is widened on the right from Summer to Winthrop Square, and on the left to Franklin Street.

Devonshire Street is widened on the left from Summer to Winthrop Square, and straightened and widened on the right to Milk.

Congress Street is widened on the right from Broad to the junction with Federal Street, and thence discontinued.

Pearl Street is carried to the junction of Water and Federal streets.

Milk Street is widened on the right from Washington to Broad Street; and Water Street on the left to Battery-march.

Broad Street is widened on the water side from Summer to Oliver; and Purchase is widened on the right from Summer Street.

good round sum, and now he talks of buying the Norwich engine I wrote about, and presenting it to the city as a thank offering.

I suppose that you are well on your way to Rome by this time. I hope at least that you are not hanging about Paris for more bad news. Go ahead and enjoy yourself, and be sure that you are doing all that any good Bostonian in your place can do. Of course if you were here, you would be on relief committees and all that sort of thing, but there are lots of good men for that work, every one is willing, and we shall recover from this smash-up with a rush when we once get the step again. You say that Paris has done wonders in repairing the devastation of the Commune. I prophesy that we shall outdo Paris in wiping out all traces of our calamity, for there is a lot of pluck and life left yet in this good old town.

Always yours.

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I

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

THE newspapers of the day contain all the interesting current gossip concerning the fire of 1872. "Carleton's" *Story of the Great Fire*, and Col. Russell H. Conwell's *History of the Great Fire*, were written at the time, to supply the general demand for some connected narrative of the event. *The Boston Fire*, by F. E. Frothingham, published in 1873, contains "the losses in detail of both real and personal estate. Also, a complete list of insurance losses." A full list of all firms burned out may be found in the annual report of the Fire Department for 1872. This document also contains a complete roster of the Fire Department, the assignment for duty of each company, and some interesting comments of the Chief Engineer upon the conflagration. But the principal authority is the *Report of the Commission appointed to investigate the cause and management of the Great Fire in Boston*. In this volume of 656 pages is to be found all the evidence taken before the Commission. Here we look upon the conflagration through the eyes of cool-headed firemen, of anxious merchants, of frightened city fathers, and of citizens of all sorts. Here is everything, from the laconic statements of fire engineers to the amazing recitations of persons who dreamed dreams and saw visions. The testimony of the enginemen and drivers of the various companies

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is especially valuable as determining the manner in which they responded to the various alarms, and the delays that ensued as the result of the prevalence of the horse distemper. In the Boston Public Library is a compilation prepared by H. H. Estabrook for the *Firemen's Standard* in 1901, giving voluminous data concerning the work of the firemen on November 9 and 10. Augustus Thorndike Perkins's "Losses to Literature and the Fine Arts by the Great Fire in Boston" was prepared for the New England Historic Genealogical Society, and published in 1873.

II
THE CITY GOVERNMENT OF
BOSTON IN 1872

MAYOR
WILLIAM GASTON

ALDERMEN

WARD

1. WILLIAM WOOLLEY
2. GEORGE D. RICKER
3. MOSES FAIRBANKS
3. THOMAS L. JENKS
6. JOHN T. CLARK
6. LEONARD R. CUTTER

WARD

7. S. A. STACKPOLE
8. SYDNEY SQUIRES
11. WILLIAM C. POLAND
12. JAMES POWER
14. SAMUEL LITTLE
16. WILLIAM SAYWARD

COMMON COUNCIL

WARD

1. JAMES SMITH, FREDERICK PEASE, WILLIAM F. BROOKS,
JOSHUA WESTON.
2. WILLIAM CUNNINGHAM, NEIL DOHERTY, PATRICK
COLLINS, T. J. DACEY.
3. STEPHEN D. SALMON, JR., HORACE E. WALKER,
GEORGE P. KINGSLEY, THOMAS J. ANDERSON.
4. A. A. CLATUR, JOHN ROBERTSON, EDWARD O. SHEP-
ARD, WILLIAM E. BICKNELL.
5. AMOS L. NOYES, WILLIAM H. FLANDERS, FRANCIS H.
HUGHES, HORACE LORING.

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6. DAVID L. WEBSTER, WILLIAM E. PERKINS, HENRY W. PICKERING, EDWARD J. HOLMES.
7. JAMES J. FLYNN, J. T. CASEY, J. B. MARTIN, A. J. LAMB.
8. ISAAC H. ROBBINS, BENJAMIN HEATH, DAVID WHISTON, CHARLES DARROW.
9. WASHINGTON L. PRESCOTT, C. A. PAGE, E. P. WILBUR, JOHN S. MOULTON.
10. STEPHEN L. EMERY, J. F. MARSTON, FREDERICK S. RISTEEN, J. J. MCNUTT.
11. M. F. DICKINSON, JR., W. F. ROBINSON, A. H. CATON, W. W. BLACKMAR.
12. CHARLES H. HERSEY, FREEBORN ADAMS, JR., W. H. HART, J. H. LOCKE.
13. THOMAS BRENNAN, BARTHOLOMEW DOLAN, J. M. MULLANE, DANIEL DOWD.
14. WILLIAM H. JONES, ISAAC P. GRAGG, T. C. FAXON, H. D. BRADT.
15. JAMES DEVINE, CHARLES D. BICKFORD, WILLIAM G. THACHER, H. A. WRIGHT.
16. WILLIAM H. WEST, CHARLES A. BURDITT, G. L. BURT, HARTFORD DAVENPORT.

III

THE BOSTON FIRE DEPARTMENT

THE ordinance in force in 1872 provided that a Chief Engineer of the Fire Department and fourteen Assistant Engineers should be elected annually by a concurrent vote of the two branches of the City Council, and they were subject to removal at pleasure by the same body. Members of the department were appointed by the Mayor with the consent of the Aldermen; but any member below the rank of assistant engineer could be dismissed by the Mayor without reference to either chamber of the Council. The steam fire engine companies consisted of eleven men, — an engineer, fireman, and driver, who served permanently, and eight call hosemen, who did duty only at fires. One of these call men was nominated annually by each company as foreman, his election being subject to the approval of the Board of Engineers and of the Board of Aldermen. This officer, while in command at fires, had no authority in the company quarters, the engineer being supreme when the apparatus was not in service. Each hose and ladder company consisted of a permanent driver, with a corresponding complement of call men who nominated their foreman annually in the same way as the engine companies. Only the permanent men rode to fires, the hose being carried on a two-wheeled reel, or jumper, which was attached to the rear of the en-

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gine. Steamer companies 6, 12, 13, 14, 16, and 17 were supplied with horse hose-carriages, and carried an extra driver on their permanent rolls. The detached hose companies were maintained in Boston for economical reasons only, the low water-pressure in the city never justifying their existence. It was the practice of these companies to attach their hose to any steamer playing a single stream, and this custom never produced more unfortunate results than in the early stages of the Great Fire. The organization of the Fire Department was as follows:—

BOSTON FIRE DEPARTMENT, 1872

COMMITTEE ON FIRE DEPARTMENT

Alderman	William Woolley
“	Leonard R. Cutter
“	John T. Clark
Councilman	William M. Flanders
“	John S. Moulton
“	George L. Burt
“	James F. Marston
“	William H. Jones

ENGINEERS

CHIEF ENGINEER, John S. Dandrell

ASSISTANT ENGINEERS

Joseph Dunbar	Rufus B. Farrar
Zenas E. Smith	James Munroe
William A. Green	John Colligan
George Brown	Joseph Barnes
John W. Regan	Sylvester H. Hebard

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John S. Jacobs

Levi W. Shaw

Phineas D. Allen

George W. Clark

STEAM FIRE ENGINE COMPANIES

Mazeppa No. 1. — Dorchester, near Fourth Street, South Boston.
S. R. Spinney No. 2. — Fourth Street, between L and K, South Boston.

Eagle No. 3. — Washington Street, near Dover.

Barnicoat No. 4. — Brattle Square (temporary quarters).

Elisha Smith No. 5. — Marion Street, East Boston.

Melville No. 6. — Wall Street.

T. C. Amory No. 7. — East Street.

Northern Liberty No. 8. — Salem Street.

Maverick No. 9. — Paris Street, East Boston.

Cataract No. 10. — Mt. Vernon, corner River Street.

John S. Damrell No. 11. — Sumner Street, East Boston.

Warren No. 12. — Corner Warren and Dudley streets, Roxbury District.

Tremont No. 13. — Cabot Street, Roxbury District.

Dearborn No. 14. — Centre Street, Roxbury District.

Walter E. Hawes No. 15. — Corner Dorchester Avenue and Broadway Extension.

S. H. Hebard No. 16. — Temple Street, Ward 16.

Protector No. 17. — Meeting House Hill, Ward 16.

Torrent No. 18. — Harvard Street, Ward 16.

Alert No. 19. — Norfolk Street, Dorchester District.

Independence No. 20. — Walnut Street, Ward 16.

J. H. Upham No. 21. — Boston Street, Ward 16.

HORSE HOSE-COMPANIES

Washington No. 1. — Salem Street.

Union No. 2. — Hudson, between Harvard and Oak streets.

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Franklin No. 3. — North Grove Street.

Chester No. 4. — Northampton Street.

Suffolk No. 5. — Shawmut Avenue, near Canton Street.

William Woolley No. 6. — 391 Chelsea Street, East Boston.

Eliot No. 7. — Tremont Street, Roxbury District.

Tremont No. 8. — Church Street, between Fayette and Melrose streets.

Lawrence No. 9. — B Street, South Boston.

Bradlee No. 10. — Dorchester Street, Washington Village, South Boston.

Webster No. 11. — Engine House No. 9, East Boston.

HOOK AND LADDER COMPANIES

Warren No. 1. — Warren Square.

Washington No. 2. — Sumner, corner Orleans Street, East Boston.

Franklin No. 3. — Harrison Avenue, corner Warcham Street.

Washington No. 4. — Eustis Street, Roxbury District.

Hancock No. 5. — Fourth Street, near Dorchester Street, South Boston.

Gen. Grant No. 6. — Temple Street, Ward 16.

Everett No. 7. — Meeting House Hill, Ward 16.

Extinguisher Corps No. 1. — Bulfinch Street.

Extinguisher Corps No. 2. — Hook and Ladder House No. 3.

Extinguisher Corps No. 3. — Engine House No. 9, East Boston.

IV

ORIGIN OF THE FIRE

THE building in which the fire originated was owned by Seman Klous. The basement and first floor were occupied by Tebbetts, Baldwin & Davis, wholesale dry-goods merchants, the second floor by Damon, Temple & Co., dealers in men's furnishing goods, while A. K. Young leased the rest of the building for the manufacture and sale of hoop-skirts and bustles, and for the sale of corsets. After an exhaustive inquiry the special commission appointed by the Mayor to investigate the cause and management of the fire reported as follows: "It is conclusively proved that the fire began near the elevator in the rear of the basement of the building, and passed with great rapidity up the elevator to the upper stories. . . . The condition of the floor, after the ruin, shows that it probably began near the ceiling. To the more important question how the fire began, no answer can be given. There is no evidence whatever criminating any of the occupants of the building, nor is there anything to show that it caught from the furnace or the boiler, except the fact that it began in that portion of the building. And the condition of the boiler and its surroundings, after the fire and the excavations, as described by witnesses, and as observed by members of the Commission, seem to show

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that it did not take from the heating apparatus, unless it took from some flue. Of this there is no evidence."

DELAYS RESULTING FROM THE HORSE DISEASE

The investigating commission appointed by the Mayor went very conscientiously into the question of the response of the engines to the alarms given for the great fire, and one of the longest sections in their report is devoted to the "Delay from want of horses." Their conclusions were that "time was invaluable and time was lost," and that all but two of the engines were "delayed from three to five minutes for the nearest, to forty minutes for the most distant." They declared that the horses of the fire department were undoubtedly unfit for use, but that "the fatal error lay in not having supplied their places with others able to do the work. . . . There is no evidence that this occurred to any one, but it ought to have occurred to those whose especial duty it was to guard the community from the perils of fire."

This censure is severe enough, and yet the fact remains that the failure to hire horses was responsible for only a portion of the delay. The trouble, so far as the downtown companies were concerned, arose less from the slow progress of the steamers through the streets, than from the simple fact that the steamers did not start. It was the order emanating from the meeting of October 26, suspending the taking out of steamers on first alarms, that played havoc with a critical situation. Under the running card we have seen that, in response to a call from Box 52, six steamers

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should have been at work within ten minutes. According to the testimony of the firemen themselves, it took twenty minutes to gather this force on the night of November 9. As it was imperative that fires in the vicinity of Box 52 should be met in their incipency, that they should not be allowed to develop great heat, because of the lack of water to control a large body of flame or to protect surrounding property from its menace, it was dangerous, of course, to decrease the speed with which the engines travelled in the streets. But it was far more dangerous to hold them in reserve in quarters until repeated alarms had announced a conflagration.

The following tables have been compiled with a view to showing what the response of the department was on November 9 as compared with what it would have been a month earlier with the regular running card in force. The running time of each company is based largely upon the testimony given before the Commission, testimony that certainly would not tend to magnify the discrepancy in speed between hand and horse-power. The first table shows the various alarms given for the great fire, how engines should have responded under the running card, and how they actually did respond on November 9, the running card being suspended.

The second table shows the approximate time at which engines were due to arrive at Box 52, operating under the running card, and the approximate time that they did arrive, moving under the special regulations of October 26.

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TABLE I

Alarms given for the Great Fire as set forth in the Annual Report of the Fire Department			Response of Engines to Box 52, as provided in the Department running card	Response of Engines to Box 52 on Nov. 9, 1872
Box 52 Corner Bedford and Lincoln streets	1st alarm	7.24 P. M.	Engines 3 " 4 " 6 " 7 " 8 " 10	Engine 7 " 10
Box 52	2d alarm	7.29 P. M.	Engine 1	Engine 4 " 8 " 9
Box 52	3d alarm	7.34 P. M.	Engine 12 " 13	Engine 3 " 6 " 11
Box 52	4th alarm (3 Twelves)	7.45 P. M.	Engine 2 " 5 " 9 " 11 " 14 " 16 " 17 " 18 " 19 " 20 " 21	Engine 1 " 2 " 5 " 12 " 13 " 14 " 17 " 18 " 21
Box 52	5th alarm	8 P. M.	The 4th or general alarm was supposed to summon the entire department with the exception of engine 15	Engine 15 " 16 " 19
Box 123 Broadway and Dorchester Ave.	6th alarm	8.17 P. M.		Engine 20
Box 123	7th alarm (3 Twelves)	8.24 P. M.		No response
Box 48 Boston, Hartford and Eric R.R. station		10.09 P. M.		No response

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TABLE II

Engine No.		Approximate time at which engines should have arrived at fire by horse- power, following the regular run- ning card	Approximate time engines did arrive at fire, under the special regulations of Oct. 26, 1872	Minutes late
				On Time
1		7.39	7.57	18
"	2 * †	7.57	8.15	18
"	3	7.32	7.45	13
"	4	7.30	7.36	6
"	5	8.05	8.12	7
"	6	7.32	7.44	12
"	7	7.26	7.26	0
"	8	7.32	7.38	6
"	9	8.05	7.50	15 ‡
"	10	7.34	7.39	5
"	11	8.05	7.55	10 ‡
"	12	7.55	8.05	10
"	13	7.55	8.—	5
"	14 *	8.05	8.10	5
"	15	**	8.05	**
"	16 *	8.30	8.55	25
"	17	8.10	8.15	5
"	18	8.25	8.40	15
"	19	8.35	9.30	55
"	20 *	8.20	8.55	35
"	21	8.—	8.05	5

Discretion was used by some company officers, fortunately in the cases of Engines 9, 10, and 11, less fortunately in the case of Engines 1, 12, 19, and 20. The case of Engine 15 is worthy of mention. This company was nearer to the fire than any other, with the exception of No. 7, but they

* Used horses.

† Detained by Broadway drawbridge being open.

‡ Arrived ahead of time.

** Engine 15 not to leave South Boston except by order of engineer.

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had instructions not to leave South Boston except by order of an engineer. A messenger could have reached their house from Summer Street in five minutes, but they did not start until eight o'clock, thirty-six minutes after the sounding of the first alarm, and not until at least three more distant engines had passed their quarters on their way downtown. The rules governing Engine 15 had nothing to do with the special regulations of October 26, being a part of the regular running card.

V

THE USE OF POWDER

THE evidence bearing upon the use of powder in fighting the conflagration will be found in the well-indexed report of the investigating commission. In its summing up, the Commission expressed itself as follows: "There is a conflict of testimony as to the balance of good or evil arising from the use of gunpowder on November 9 and 10. It is less necessary to strike the balance accurately, because all witnesses agree, and all sane people will agree, that explosives never should be used again, as they were at that time, and that, if used at all, we should be prepared to employ them, skilfully, carefully, and by a fixed plan." The City Ordinance provided that a building could be demolished only by consent of three Engineers, and two or three hours before he gave out his permits at City Hall the Chief summoned his assistants to confer with him in Federal Street as to the wisdom of using powder. As a result there was a long period when nearly all of the Engineers were withdrawn from the direction of their men and were engaged in fighting their way through crowds in efforts to find their commander. At this time the out-of-town companies were fast arriving and there was no one in authority to locate them or to superintend their getting to work. Several of the

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Engineers left their posts only after repeated summons, and their withdrawal from fire fighting at a critical time was doubtless attended by bad results.

VI

THE BURNING OF TRINITY CHURCH

OLD TRINITY seemed safe all night, but towards morning the fire swept into her rear, and there was no chance. She went at four in the morning. I saw her well afire inside and out, carried off some books and robes, and left her. She burnt majestically, and her great tower stands now solid as ever, a most picturesque and stately ruin. She died in dignity. I did not know how much I liked the great gloomy old thing till I saw her windows bursting and the flame running along the old high pews.—Phillips Brooks to Miss Mitchell, Nov. 12, 1872. (ALLEN'S *Life and Letters of Phillips Brooks*, vol. ii, p. 67.)

Mr. Brooks was sitting in one of the pews of Trinity Church, with Mr. Dillon the sexton, resting after the fatigues of the awful night, when the flames were seen stealing in at the roof of the northeast corner. They waited there together, watching the progress of the flames, until it became unsafe to remain. As they were hurriedly leaving the building, Mr. Dillon, in his excitement, threw open the great doors of the tower and fastened them back, as had been his habit for many years when the congregation was to disperse after service was over, — this last time, as it were,

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for the invisible crowd of witnesses to take their final departure. — ALLEN'S *Life and Letters of Phillips Brooks*, vol. ii, p. 68.

VII

THE UNION SAFE DEPOSIT VAULTS

I HOVERED round the Safety Vaults in State Street, where I had a good deal of destructible property of my own and others, but no one was allowed to enter them. So I saw (on Sunday morning) the fire eating its way straight toward my deposits, and millions of others with them, and thought how I should like it to have them wiped out with that red flame that was coming along clearing everything before it. But I knew all was doing that could be done, and so I took it quietly enough, and managed to sleep both Saturday and Sunday night tolerably well, though I got up every now and then to see how far and how fast the flames were spreading northward. — Dr. Holmes to John Lothrop Motley, Nov. 16, 1872. (*Life and Letters of Oliver Wendell Holmes*, by JOHN T. MORSE, JR., vol. ii, p. 197.)

VIII

THE FREEMAN'S BANK

THE Freeman's Bank sent their charred bills and papers to the Treasury Department in Washington where, by the delicate processes employed there, many items were restored or deciphered. Through the honesty of its depositors the bank received vouchers for its entire loan, and the only suit growing out of the destruction of the safe concerned a firm that was mistaken, but not dishonorable. This suit was amicably settled by the deciphering of the disputed item at the Treasury Department.

IX

OUTSIDE HELP

THE following cities and towns sent steam fire engines to Boston on November 9 and 10: Cambridge (3), Charlestown (2), Chelsea, Somerville, Medford, West Roxbury (2), Malden, Hyde Park, Newton (2), Watertown, Lawrence, Lynn (2), Salem (2), Worcester (2), Melrose, Waltham, Stoneham, Fall River (2), New Bedford, Providence, R. I. (3), Portsmouth, N. H., Manchester, N. H. (2), Norwich, Conn. (2), New Haven, Conn. All of these engines did duty at the fire with the exception of Metacomet No. 3 of Fall River, which was returned without being unloaded from the cars. The first outside assistance to arrive was Niagara Steamer No. 3 of Cambridge, at 8.15 Saturday evening; the last to report was H. M. Welch Steamer No. 2 of New Haven, which ended its long run in the Boston railroad yards shortly before midnight on Sunday.

In addition to the above, two steamers were present from the Navy Yard in Charlestown and one from the Watertown Arsenal. Wakefield sent two hand engines, and Brookline and Reading one each. A number of out-of-town hose companies also reported in Boston, one of these from Biddeford, Maine.

The closing of the telegraph offices throughout New England in the early evening was a serious handicap to the

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Boston authorities. The fire was visible from Nashua, and an engine was housed in the freight sheds there in expectation of a call which never came. A Taunton engine was in readiness for the special train bringing help from Fall River; but through some misunderstanding this train went through the city without stopping. Lowell and Newburyport received no call for aid. Portland forwarded an engine as far as Portsmouth, where word was received that its services were not needed.

Mr. Grenville H. Norcross, whose father was the first treasurer of the Summer Street Fire Fund, has kindly furnished the following memorandum upon the disposition of outside financial aid: —

The fire was hardly under control when the Relief Committee was formed and a large sum was soon contributed to help those who had suffered by the fire as well as the families of firemen injured in the discharge of their duty. Large amounts were sent or promised by Detroit, Chicago, Philadelphia, and other cities. By February, 1873, it became evident that sufficient money was in the Treasurer's hands to meet all proper claims without calling for aid from other cities, and accordingly the sums already sent were gratefully returned, with the interest received on them while on deposit, and the promised aid was thankfully declined.

The fund in aid of the families of injured firemen is still being used for that purpose; a balance of some twenty thou-

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sand dollars of the general relief fund was used for many years by the Committee to supply Boston working men who had lost them by fire, with sufficient tools to obtain work again. In 1907, under authority of the Legislature and the Supreme Court, the balance was turned over to the Massachusetts Charitable Fire Society, which now carries on the same good work, and the Summer Street Fire Committee ceased to exist.

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1872

THE
GREAT
BOSTON
FIRE

MURDOCK
